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Dearest Mother

Monday 18th Sept

Once again I am a day late with diary but have a good excuse this time as we at last participated in a small way in a big attack which you will have seen about in the papers before this reaches you. We did not accomplish anything unfortunately but had a good try which is some satisfaction. I fear a little more will have to be done before we can hope to get through successfully.

I have been fortunate enough to receive quite a few Canadian letters this week which are always welcome.

I sent the nice letter from Mrs Murphy which Father forwarded on to Wood. He has been a faithful adherent to the militia for many years.

Two of your letters Mother dear came this week one dated Aug 21st and the other I sent on to Wood without noting its date but I think prior to that. I am so sorry to hear that the great heat effected you so much. It must have been most trying and I hope by now is all over. I cannot say that we suffered from heat over here as the nights were always cool and I have always been glad of my blankets. I do hope you and Alice will be feeling more normal by now.

I had a nice letter from Aunt Louisa and also Geneva which I must try and find time to answer soon. I do not see how the former does so much writing with her many other

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ties and duties. Her family is growing up very rapidly.

I received a nice letter from Mrs Brunton who said she had written to you and also one from Uncle Jack. Sarah forwarded also letters she had from Aunt Emma and Aunt May. The farmer has had such a nice outing at Murray Bay. I am so glad you will enjoyss having her visit you later on. I am sorry to hear that Uncle Howard is so miserable and Aunt Tilly must need a rest very badly.

Archie Mc Mahon's cigarettes came at a very opportune moment as I was just out of them. It was so kind of him. I must try and write at first opportunity.

A nice letter from Elaine at Larnal dated 19th Aug. They seem to have had such a nice time together and the extension that James got must have added greatly to its pleasure.

Father's hand written letter of Aug 20th came via Wood and you can tell how I am delighted to hear of the advantageous sale of the Larnal lathe. It is an elephant off our hands. I wish we were closer to the sea also as I am sure shipbuilding is going to be one of the great industries after the war. and glad Mr Morgan got a holiday.

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but you say in a later letter it was only for a week which hardly seems enough.

Lamond's Hamilton Calshams hair-pins are up. Those firms that had a good stock of plates to start with should do well before they work them off.

I also have Father's diary letters of 21st & 28th and his personal letter of 27th. I also saw one to Wood with whom I had lunch yesterday and will try and write a few lines separately about them. Their contents is altogether most satisfactory. It was the first time I had seen Wood since receipt of Father's cable and if we had had something to drink I am sure we would have toasted the arrival of "goose egg" day.

Monday 11th Sept Took a ride over surrounding hills to try and find a clover field to buy for green forage for our horses. It will soon be over now and we feel we will want to take advantage of it when we can. I found several but they were small and inferior and of course the owners wanted a big price and wanted us to cut it also. We have a good field now which we are cutting ourselves but it will soon be finished. We carry 12 reaping hooks per squadron for this purpose. Heard that we might be used during the coming week and started off with straw

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to reconnoiter the ground. He was called back however to attend a conference so I rode north instead and mapped out a scheme for tomorrow. Was caught in the rain. Passed a camp in "pens" with several hundred German prisoners in it. They had tents to live in and were cooking their own meals. They have the option (I believe) of working out the roads and are paid for it. Was caught in rain on way back. There is more "batter" in the soil here which is very chalky but when it is wet it is very slippery both for man and beast. Spencer is having a mess room built for us as he has been able to get some lumber and galvanized sheets and in time we should be able to make ourselves quite comfortable.

Tuesday 12th Sept Carried out the scheme I planned yesterday in the morning. Took down the summary of evidence against poor Swinton (a reinforcement officer) for his General Court Martial. I did not like doing it but was ordered to. I felt sorry for him especially as there was another officer with him whom I considered equally guilty. Straws Trade up to the front right after lunch and spent the afternoon reconnoitering the roads approaching our area with a view to selecting the best route to come up with regiment if

required. Saw Wood's friend General Morrison. He knew me although I had never met him before to the best of my knowledge. I never saw so much artillery in my life as is concentrated up there in the valleys and slopes of the hills. All kinds of guns from field guns to 12" howitzers. Saw all kinds and they were firing pretty steadily. Went home across country and met Homer Slison who said leave was out again for the 1st Division who had already done their share.

Several letters from Sarah including arrears. Wrote her. Bamie of R.C.D.'s was up to see Straw. He said they were all concentrated not very far from us. Spencer went into the large city which is 12 miles from here and bought supplies. He said the shops were fine. It has a population of 90,000 but the attendants in stores were all women and boys. We had a very good dinner of fresh mackerel as a result of his trip.

Wednesday 13th Sept Started at 9.00 and spent the day in front reorganizing the line. It was wet most of the time and terribly slippery. Had lunch and a feed with us. Visited one of these 40 foot square German dug outs and it was fitted up as described in the papers. There were still some dead bodies in one room. It has two exits in case one was stopped

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by a direct hit from a shell. The country is strewn with German ammunition and equipment of all kinds but near the front and around the villages we have recently taken it is churned with shell holes again & again until there is not an inch of the original surface left. Saw some of the French 75's operating for the first time also met Archie Mac and Brooke also Badwell who was in our class at R.M.C. We reconnoitred routes right up but it would take some days to get familiar with the country. I rather refrain from gathering souvenirs although ^{our} officer took a helmet off a German body, and later tried it on himself!! Sarah sent me a Baedeker of northern France and I think I will find it very useful as it is nice to know a little about the places you are going through. It was an unlucky 13th for me as I lost my pocket compass and had my spurs stolen at night.

Thursday 14th Left Practised shock tactics in the morning although I fail to see very much use in them over shell holes and wire. Read over the operation orders which came in and studied the situation on the map. Was president of court martial in the afternoon but it did not last long. Heard that Hunt Taylor had been killed the first hour he was in the

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trenches after returning from England after his last wound. Got my things together for the move tomorrow and wrote Sarah a few lines.

Friday 15th Sept Up at 3.00 A.M and left billets at 4.00 after a hasty breakfast. We left our 2nd line magazines behind. We were at the rendezvous at 6.00 and after waiting an hour or so were ordered to Divisional Headquarters where we again waited. The attack was at 6.20 and I believe the 1st objective was made with little opposition on the part of the Germans who were left alive after our artillery fire. Our men ^(infantry) followed about 50 to 100 yards behind our own artillery barrage.

We saw General Turner and he made Straw & go into his mess for lunch as we had to wait until a certain trench was taken before making our attempt with 2 squadrons. Straw & and the Squadron commanders went forward to reconnoitre and the regiment followed to an advanced rendezvous later. We rode as far as we could ~~meeting~~ and then walked meeting an almost continuous line of German prisoners and wounded. Many of the prisoners were used as stretcher bearers. I was not impressed with them and they looked very worn and glad to be out of it. The advanced dressing stations were crowded and rows of stretchers were waiting attention. I did not hear a groan or murmur

from any of the four chaps, all those with minor wounds walked that could. The German wounded were being brought in just the same as our own. One of the new armoured caterpillars passed us. They really did wonderful work and could go right up to a machine gun emplacement and put it out of business in short order. They can cross almost any trench or obstacle but you have doubtless read of them in the press. We were now acting with Archie Mac's Brigade which was attacking the trench whose capture we were waiting and I remained at Brigade HQ as liaison officer practically all night to follow the situation and tell our people where to go. It was really most interesting. A 2nd objective was made about 6.00 P.M. but the trench we were waiting for still held out. At two AM on Saturday 17th Sept [the anniversary of our arrival in France] one troop was ordered to make the attempt and Campbell started out and I truly never expected to see him again. The Germans by this time had found out where we were and were shelling very heavily. I don't know how the regiment got off so lightly as several times the shells burst so close that the mud (it was raining) fell all around us. We had had a working party filling in trenches

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and shell holes right down to the old German front line all evening to make a track for the horses. We decided it was unnecessary to keep the regiment up so far and returned to where we could get water about a mile further back and off saddled and the men lay down in the mud and got what rest they could. I remained at Brigade HQ until 3.00 getting the information as it came in by runners from the village we had taken.

Campbell got back about 5.00 after having gone to the village (our front line) and being held up there by all kinds of obstacles. I had done his best and I don't really see how they got out of it again. I got 2 hours sleep under a bush and then had to return here for the Court Martial of four deserters. I returned after lunch to the front. Fortunately it was a beautiful day and Spencer had managed to get our ration & forage up to us. We had patrols (dismounted) right up in front but no chance presented itself. At 6.00 P.M. Cocksbutt and I rode up as far as we could and then pushed through the village into no man's land. We found later we must have been very close to the trench that held us up last night. We found the village absolutely impossible for horses but found a way round it. We had to go across country of course and floundered through shell

hales and flapped every few moments when we heard a shell coming our way. There were dead everywhere, some kneeling and one German with his arms up as if he had surrendered just as was hit. I stepped on several half buried bodies several times. There were many dead Canadians too but we could not stop to get the identity discs off all so it was not we looking any. We were mighty glad to stumble into the old German front line where we found some of our supports. This trench was covered with dead in some places on the bottom. I appreciated my tin hat very much and once when passing some of our men in the trench just as a shell was bursting I had a piece of shrapnel hit a hat just beside me. After getting our route planned Cackshut got out and take our hats off to the brave infantry every time. He made a report in the morning and sent three make patrols out to follow up our path and try and get further. Two of them ran into the Germans and were shot at and had other interesting experiences and collected souvenirs. I started these patrols off on the right track and then went over and had lunch with Wood who I found looking very well. He has a nice gun position overlooking his four batteries and is sleeping

in an old German dugout. He told ¹¹ me ^{18 Sept}
his brigade was firing 3000 rounds a day.

Later we were ordered back here as I
suppose the Corps commander considered
our opportunity had passed after things were
settled down and lines being consolidated.

We were very sorry to return, at least I was
as I find this waiting job very irksome
indeed especially when I have no responsibility
and so little to do. We got in about 11.00 last
night and found our tents partially occupied
by a Highland regiment on its way up
but they left today so we are all right again.

It was our first possible chance and
for that reason an interesting experience
and I think we will manage better next
time if we get another. I forgot to say
our objectives were certain enemies gun
positions on the other side of his line. My
experiences were only the everyday ones of the
infantry and for that reason I want the family
only to see this letter

Monday 18th Sept. As I spent Saturday night
in a dugout occupied by prussians units
I found myself lousy last night so threw all
my underclothes outside and had a good hunt
and a hot bath this A.M. It has rained
hard all day and we are glad of spurs
but with its tin roof. I am afraid it

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will hamper operations in front and be
terribly slippery. We were all very put out
to see no mention of Canadians having taken the
two villages we ~~did~~ took. We are so often in the
press in other ways that it seems to have had me
do not get the credit when it is really ours.

The Corps has taken over 1000 prisoners since
Friday morning.

Will draw to a close as I must have a
walk in spite of rain before dinner and
I believe there is a mail tonight. I do not
know what our casualties have been but
I fear pretty heavy. There were only two
unwounded officers left in one battalion.

Ferris one of our officers lost a brother I
am sorry to say. Col Blythe Campbell AMC
of Montreal (a 3rd) was killed in the village
when trying to locate a spot for an
advanced dressing station. He was one of
the closest doctors in the city.

Am sorry I did not send a Trudeau
letter this week but perhaps this will
make up.

very much love
your devoted son

Shb