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Received from H-17 Sunday  
1916 17 Dec

Dearest Mother

Mails have been very backward this week and the one or two letters I have received from Sarah are practically a week old but I suppose it is what we must expect from now until the first of the year.

Sarah sent me your letter of 21 Nov which I am passing on to Wood frame whom I received your diary letter. I have not seen Rufus since last March but hear that he has his captancy and is still over here. That clique is pretty well scattered with Herbie <sup>Harmon</sup> wounded, Hal Brown killed and Rufus over here. Heahes is over here as Field Cashier of our latest Division and I heard fast night affects belts. It is a caution how he gets away with it as I heard funny things about him on all sides. I also have seen quite a few enclosures you have sent over both to Wood and myself. I have been busy for last 10 days with this billiting news for but am now through. I fear I neglected my midweek letter last Wednesday but sent the cable which Wood will likely send from London next week with our combined wishes.

Thank Alice for sweet letter of

16<sup>th</sup> Nov which I sent on to Wood and <sup>17<sup>th</sup> Dec</sup>  
assure her that I will be more careful  
about taking long walks or rides alone  
at night as we did have one of our men  
shot in the shoulder by some unseen who  
fired once at him as he was walking from  
~~the~~ the station here about 6.00 PM one night.

We have not yet been able to trace it nor  
have the French grandames. I hope  
next year we may be able to have a hunt  
together on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov as she suggests.

I also have Father's business letter of  
27<sup>th</sup> Nov which sounds encouraging  
and also his personal letter of 26<sup>th</sup> from  
the Falls and saw his of 22<sup>nd</sup> to  
Wood. I do hope he is feeling better  
and strong again. Sarah has also sent  
me a sweet letter that he wrote her.

I also want to thank you for December  
Cosmopolitan which has been most  
acceptable reading the last few nights  
in bed.

Estelle's Xmas package has come with a  
sweet note and I have made a good start  
on it. I also have a nice one via Sarah  
from Edna and a box of cigars and  
some cake came from Cousin Cara  
& Bill Nicholson today. It was dear  
of them and I do appreciate it so  
much. I had a nice letter also from

Uncle Jack. I have written all the aunts  
 and uncles except Aunt Berdie and will  
 manage her this week I hope, so I feel quite  
 proud of myself. I sent off my English  
 Christmas cards last night and now only  
 have the arrangement of our own officers  
 Christmas dinner here, for which Sarah is  
 sending me favors and place cards. I  
 will send you a menu later on. It seems  
 hard to realize that this is the 3rd Christmas  
 of war, of which I will have spent one in  
 Canada, one in England and one in France.

Sunday 11th Dec. Had two court martials  
 which kept me all day at Corps Hqts.  
 where I had lunch at "B" mess with Col  
 Anderson. It interfered with my billeting  
 a little but cannot be helped. I had to  
 adjourn one for further evidence. I had  
 intended making a tour and staying out  
 over night but it was too late when I  
 got through. Had an hour with old  
 Barber and wrote and read until midnight.

Tuesday 12th Dec Up at 6.00 and after an early  
 breakfast got started at 7.30 in train and  
 set on a billeting tour of 8 or 9 French  
 villages. The schoolmaster is usually  
 the "greffier" or secretaire de la Maire  
 and some of them are very decent chaps

but either too old or too delicate for the Army.  
 The French people are making great sacrifices for their country far greater than we are. Most of these habitants live on practically brown bread alone. I wonder how people in either London would like such a fare and I am sure the Army and officers messes especially would raise a great howl. I would like to see some restrictions on latter. I had several very interesting talks with some of the natives. Was soaked and chilled when I got back and was glad of my nice fire and a change and felt sorry for the poor fellows in the trenches in wet and slush and mud. It was a miserable day. No mail when I got back. I spent the balance of the day tabulating the results of my work.

Tuesday 13th Met the two other infantry officers who were assisting me and recorded their reports. Made to ~~at~~ at noon where I had lunch and continued my adjourned court martial in the afternoon. They presented me with another German shell case which I was glad to get as it is better than my other one. Very cold morning home about 12 miles and dark too.

Thursday 14 Nov - Spent the morning checking up some more believing that I was not satisfied with and ran over to Camp with my report after lunch but did not see Col Anderson as he was out. I heard later that my work was very satisfactory.

Then returned to [ ] and accompanied Col Smith McEwen Spencer & Cockslett down one of the biggest mines here compared with which the one I saw with Wood was a one horse affair. The main drifts were tunneled out of rock and like the corridors of a hospital, all white washed and clean. There were two well appointed stables (all underground) each with from 60 to 70 horses named and in steel and cement stalls. There were 2 blacksmith shops with each stable and the horses were without doubt the best I have seen in France. They undercut the coal vein which is only about 2 metres thick and then blast it down with dynamite. I had the pleasure of firing one charge. I saw several men who had been in Pennsylvania and said they would return when the war was over. This shows the way the French Republic has its hand out every Frenchman all over the world. General McEwen was over for dinner and we spent a pleasant evening. He is only a Captain in his

own regiment the <sup>6</sup>R.C.D's but I will say that he has gotten on through real merit which is more than you can say of most of them. We gave him a very good dinner.

Friday 15 Dec Took a ride on the pony in the morning and attended stables from 9.00 to 12.30. Studied a little French and then rode over to — and had dinner with Wood. and remained until 8.00 when I came back for my hour with Barbier. No mail today which is disappointing. Very dark at night but we must expect it now I suppose.

Saturday 16th Dec Bright sunny morning. Involved up to trenches with Cackshutt where things were livelier than usual on account of clear day. Campbell is up there just now. We saw a trench mortar shoot which was very interesting. Some of our big T.M. shells make a tremendous explosion as large as a 9.2" how. Met Willie Cronyn again strange to say who said Hyla expected to get over for Xmas. Fied is with his mother now. Back about 4.00 in motor which is a great relief as compared with riding.

Strawbenze and I rode over and had dinner with Mr Brien whose brigade is resting near us but goes up next week.

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One of his officers knew Glazebrook very well who used to be in London also Leonard. We had a very pleasant evening and got back about 9.30 PM

Sunday 17 Dec Sean is not back from leave yet so Leshe gave me my hot bath and nearly parboiled me. I felt like church so went down to mass at 10.00 AM and was able to say a paper for yawall during the service and could understand quite a bit of the sermon. On my way back heard a band playing a few old Christmas hymns which also raised a lump in my throat. Started this after lunch and intended to go to — later but Wood and Robertson landed in and I have been chatting to them until a few minutes ago when they went. I asked them over to dinner on Sunday next. Wood hopes to get away on Thursday 21st and I hope will have a nice leave. I wish I was going over this year again but will have to be patient.

Just have a note from our host here saying he wants Strawbenzies in my rooms for two sisters-in-law for two weeks. I don't know what we will do as the town is now pretty well filled up. I will be with you all in thought at least this coming week. sbt