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**Western Archives, Western University**

France  
25 Feb 15

My Dearest Mother

I shall endeavor to  
give you a brief resumé of the past  
few days but please do not let same  
go outside the family circle.

If you turn to a map of N.E.  
France you can probably find the  
town of Hezenbrouck marked. We  
started from Crestre, a village a  
couple of miles N. East of Hezenbrouck  
~~and~~ on Tuesday morning and marched  
to Armentières via Flitre, Bailloul  
and Nieppe arriving at our  
destination in the early afternoon. The  
country all along is uninteresting and  
shows no signs of war except for an  
occasional grave by the roadside  
marked by a wooden cross. The roads  
are paved in the centre with large  
cobblestones and the sides are mud  
except where French territorialists  
have spread broken bricks

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The traffic is stupendous and we must have passed hundreds and hundreds of motor lorries. Some of these are the regular army ones but many still bear the names of their original owners (such as Lever Bros Sunlight Soap) and others are converted motor buses.

The 3rd Infantry Brigade followed us under Col Turner of Quebec. It consists of 3 Highland battalions (Montreal Scots, 48th of Toronto and a composite corps) and Meighan's battalion. On arriving in Armentieres we were attached to various units, my battery going to the 34th Battery R.F.A. 38th Brigade.

Armentieres is a large manufacturing city (noted for linen etc) and the population are at present in their homes though they only returned recently after the

Germans stopped shelling the place. The British line is on the outskirts of the town and consists of a line of breastworks with guns of various descriptions well in rear. An intermittent cannonade is being carried on all the time and the men in the trenches (so called) are sniping continually but the casualties are not great. Most of the houses in our vicinity are more or less ruined and the fields all about are full of shell holes. Any particular movement on either side brings on a cannonade from the other and if we may judge from the results here this shell fire is not particularly effective. Yesterday when we were observing from a house a German shell struck the building immediately adjacent and blew a great hole

in it but as the place was empty it did not matter.

This morning I went up to the infantry position and was shown all around by the Colonel of the regiment (The Buffs) then on duty. Both going to their line and coming back there were quite a lot of stray bullets flying about but it is unusual for any one to be hit. Battalions occupy the breastworks for five days and are then off duty for five so it is not such arduous work as one imagines. The approaches and the breastworks themselves are full of mud but wooden walks have been built and the troops seem to get on fairly well when everything is considered. Originally it was all trenches but as the water filled them, breastworks were built and now these

one quite high <sup>5</sup> made largely of  
sand bags, bricks etc. They are  
built just where the troops  
dug themselves in, last fall,  
when the Germans gave up the  
idea of getting through here and  
have no regular front or line and  
in one place only seventy yards  
separate the British and Germans.  
Continual sniping goes on all the time  
and we were often splashed with  
dirt when a bullet struck the top  
of the sandbags. This particular regiment  
loses an average of 2 killed and 2  
wounded each day but elsewhere the  
losses are often more severe. In one  
place the Germans got through a  
month or so ago and 300 men  
mostly Germans are buried in one  
spot just behind the British line.

There is an armored train here  
in charge of a Naval Lieutenant  
on which are mounted two 4.7"  
guns and one 6". I watched

16)  
them firing today at a target  
between four and five miles away.  
The noise is tremendous and the  
trucks on which the gun is mounted  
reels like a pin at each discharge  
but it is impossible to say with  
any degree of accuracy what the  
effect of such fire is.

We are of course here for  
instructional purposes only and I do  
not know where we will actually  
be sent when called upon to do  
our part. The guns are all  
carefully hidden and it is no  
uncommon thing to cover them  
up with small trees etc to screen  
them from aeroplane observation.  
The telephone systems (by which all  
communication is carried on) are  
simply wonderful and the whole  
district is a maze of wires.  
We are only a few miles from  
Lille which is held by the  
Germans and some say that it will

to the objective when offensive operations are started. We expect to go back to Caestre on March 1st and may then learn something about our future whereabouts.

The country here is very wet and as the top soil is largely clay, walking anywhere except on the roads is extremely difficult. It is not cold but this morning the ground was covered with a slight fall of snow and it has been sleeting on and off. I am billeted in an empty estaminet (tavern) the back part of which was blown down some weeks ago by German shells. They are supposed to be Saxons who are opposing us here and they are generally credited with being a decent lot but of this I can of course, only speak by hearsay.

We get the Paris papers here one day late and the English two

on these days <sup>5</sup> late which seems  
pretty good when circumstances  
are taken into consideration. On  
the whole things are more comfortable  
than on Salisbury Plains and except  
for the sniping and an occasional  
boom (which I hear as I write) one  
would not realize (after dark) that  
one is in the midst of operations  
which constitute the greatest war  
the world has ever known.

A cheerful spirit certainly  
prevails the British but everyone  
agrees that the recent Russian  
defeat puts the final settlement  
further away than ever. When one  
sees the condition of the country,  
the wet, the floods and the  
horrible sticky mud one fully  
realizes that it would be the  
worst kind of folly to attempt  
any serious movements and I am  
sure that it will probably be  
many weeks before much can be done.



9.  
Of course such delays are helpful to  
the allies as it enables them to  
get more men into the field and  
the Germans of course should soon  
be hard put to find the food  
and the necessary raw materials  
to manufacture munitions of war which  
are required in such tremendous  
quantities by their troops.

Will close this now as  
time presses. Hope Ibb is getting  
along satisfactorily with his  
command. Love to all

your devoted son

Wood