

From the holdings of
Western Archives, Western University

9th Sept 1916

Dearest Mother

As I have the happenings of two weeks to go over I will start in form where I left off on the 7th August. I have kept rough notes in my pocket diary and so can chronicle the events of each day pretty accurately. I have acknowledged the letters I have received in the brief notes I have sent you from time to time. We are today expecting the arrival of some arrears in mail as I have had no letter from England since 31st Aug.

Monday 28th August. Made a 6.00 A.M. start and did some regimental drill over the now entirely vacated area as one Canadian Division has gone south and another is just coming in so we had the ground (about 4 miles x 5 miles) to ourselves. We saw practically the whole 12th Division march through our town all day yesterday and last night and they looked very well indeed. Young Raymond (once in an effort) was a subaltern in one battalion. There are a great many changes however even in the last few months. There are a great many partridges over these hills and we start them up continually as we ride along. They seem to be well protected and flourish. In the afternoon Strambler and I rode over to the II Army school and saw a large mine (4 tons of explosive) put up for instructional purposes. It was very interesting and there were a great many

Generals and other senior officers there, including the Army and Corps Commanders. I saw General Turner and Elmsley and quite a few others that I knew. The school provided tea afterwards and it was quite pleasant. They carried out the attack on the crater after the mine went up just as it should be done in the trenches. The trench mortars had a shoot and the bombing parties went out. It was very realistic except for the audience. No music. Marnelle played in the evening, and Dawson sang. He has a very nice voice. She sings a little too. I left them about 10.00 and walked to my own nice room at the other end of the town.

Tuesday 29th August Carried out a rear guard scheme on the training area but it turned out wet and misty and was raining quite hard by the time we got in. No mail again. The Court Martial for poor Thomas was held this afternoon and I am afraid he will not have much chance. I feel very sorry for him. Walked into town in the rain to make some purchases. It simply poured so I went into YMCA and had tea done. It did not let up so I had to proceed and changed when I got back to "Villa Bon Accueil" where my room is. Wrote Estelle a letter for her birthday and also to Sarah. Music again in the evening.

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Wednesday 30th August. Heavy rain so had to put
 affair scheme in conjunction with Cyclists. Got
 all marching order for next Saturday 2nd. Inspected
 all the billets in the morning with Strawbenzie.

Rode into town in rain with Rawson to
 see White off by train for down below with a
 party of 50. He had to travel in the horse car
 with the men and as it afterwards transpired
 was 3 days en route. Tried to buy a rain coat
 but could not get what I wanted. Rawson
 paid 120 frs for one but it was too long and
 not worth that much. I will wait in hopes
 that I get leave sometime this fall. Was
 quite wet so had to change again. Wrote
 Clame, Alice and Sarah. Just evening

Thursday 31st Aug Alice's birthday. Nice day
 again. Went all morning on an outpost
 scheme and rode over some new country alone
 on the way back going over one of the roads
 we used going back for our training last
 March. I remember it perfectly. Read the papers
 after lunch until tea time when Strawbenzie
 I went for such a pretty ride along the
 banks of the canal, down on one side and
 up on the other. The inland water systems
 in France are being used to the utmost for
 military purposes. All the canal boats are
 chartered, painted grey and manned by
 R.E. All the engineers on the tugs are in uniform

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Went into town to dinner with Smith for the last time and quite enjoyed an excellent meal well served. 10 F-rs each with several drinks. Met some friends and exchanged gossip as usual.

Friday 1st Sept No scheme today as we want the horses fresh for the move tomorrow. Should have written diary letter but did not feel like it. Rode into town and made a few purchases including some trinkets for the approaching birthdays and a box of candy for Madame Poily who has been so kind to me. She very nearly kissed me when I presented her with it later and told me that the rooms would always be at my disposal if I ever returned. Inspected all the billets and horse lines which are in court yards and back streets all over the town. Rode up to Cyclists and called on Maximilien and also saw Homer Dixon about our extra dismantled men who go down by train. Read a little and slept in my nice bed for last time. Packed up what little I have.

Saturday 2nd Sept. It seems funny that I have nearly always moved on a Saturday. Now have 4 horses and Markham leads the pony with my kit bag on its back so I have everything with me except my bed roll which goes on the baggage waggon.

Made my adieux to the Professor and his daughter at Headquarters and madame. The whole town was out to wave us good bye and I think were really sorry to see us go. We pulled out at 9.30 and arrived at — soon afterwards. Quite a nice little village on a beautiful river, in which practically the whole regiment bathed in the afternoon. They got settled now very quickly. Straw and I went for our usual ride in the afternoon and started up a lot of hares as well as partridges as we went across country. Passed a beautiful Chateau surrounded by a wooded park and a high brick wall which must have cost a fortune itself. We thought we saw a lady wave to us in the distance from a window so concluded it was still occupied. If we had been staying we would have investigated further. Had a nice clean room for our mess but retired early. The bed I had was clean so I slept in it very soundly.

Sunday 3rd Left up at 6.00. Lovely day. Marched only about 15 miles after having a swim in the river above an old fashioned dam and water wheel. People all dressed up in their best for Sunday. It is the event of the week with these poor souls. Arrived about noon and the headquarters were in a real occupied chateau and most comfortable while the

squadrons were in the village about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away. My room had a very high four poster with curtains in an alcove and I was nearly lost in it. We had the hall for a mess which was decorated with a boars head and other trophies of the chase. There is a big forest nearby. Went for a long ride in the afternoon but were caught in quite a heavy down pour. Wrote Sarah a few lines and slept very well.

Monday 4th Sept Started off in the rain and met the Australians near Believing. They looked very well but said we were going to a warm cabin. I don't think they will find our old haunts much more comfortable. Also passed some British cavalry billeted en route. Crossed another river and stopped at the next which flows into the Channel. Did over 20 miles before 2:00. The village we had this time showed more signs of wear and tear due to the war and we were hardly as comfortable. Did not like the look of the bed so slept in my own on top of it. Rain in the afternoon but I went for a ride alone and passed one of our air ships. We are now in a different Army area but get our rations without a hitch by lorry every day. It takes three for ourselves and the cyclists. We don't get our mail however which is disappointing. The men bathed again in the river and

some fishing but without much success.

Have 2 nice roast chickens for dinner which we bought at our last village.

Tuesday 5th Left all clear at 8.30. Passed an Indian Cavalry Regiment billeted and was much impressed by the men. They still carry the old sabre instead of our trusty sword and a lance. Drove about 15 miles but only had half the next village as an artillery brigade moving back had the other half. We were made cramped still and I shared my room with one Ewen, like we did last summer in England. The houses are very dilapidated and the Australians had evidently left a bad name although the townspeople thinned out when they found we were Canadians. No men about except aged or wounded. Women and children doing it all. It is very sad and brings the horror of war home to me. Straw and I picked out a road for transport tomorrow ~~tomorrow~~ as very hilly. The country is getting more rolling all the time. We then visited quite an interesting town about 6 miles away and had tea served by a very pretty French girl!! Bought some cigarettes and soap. Rained again during the night. I do feel very sorry for the poor people here. We can just hear the

distant booming of the guns once again. I don't believe the French soldiers who were in this area up to last spring are as considerate of the people as we are. Write Sarah a few hurried lines and will post at a large town we expect to pass tomorrow.

Wednesday 6th Sept Up at 5.00 and shaved and bathed by candle light as we leave at 7.00 today and have a long march. Transport got stalled on a steep hill and we had to double up some of our teams to get up. I stayed back with them until 9.00 when they were out of trouble. I then trotted up and caught the regiment about noon. We made slow progress on account of heavy traffic and meeting an Australian Infantry Brigade. They do not seem to want to even pass the time of day with us and they never hardly ever salute. Some of the battalions were very weak. We also passed some tremendous aerodromes. The sound of gunning is getting louder and louder as we get up to the front. Reached our village about 2.00 and as it is also Corps Headquarters it is packed with troops. We got three stables in one end for our men and tents for the officers and our horse lines are in the fields. A & C managed to get a cow shed each for a mess and we have a shack made of tar

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paper. Everything was so filthy dirty that we moved all our tents and the men slept out until they could clean up. Raw meat had been left rotting around. The flies simply swarmed everywhere. Had no lunch as we wanted to get things straightened out at once but enjoyed my dinner. We have a saw for a bench and I now have a soap box for a chair and 2 more for my table but am very comfortable. Markham has also made me a canvas bed. We have orders to prepare horse standings for winter quarters and are promised some lumber later on. We are right on the main road where water traffic is almost continuous. My tent is only 15 feet off it but on a little mound and I sleep well in spite of noise. We had two many comforts up north and the infants up in front are in the open so we should be thankful. There are some "Archies" just near us too that sometimes let off at Hun planes very early. Received a welcome amount of mail which I have already acknowledged.

Thursday 7th Sept Had my bath as usual as there is a nice stream here. Received cable from Father and sent another congratulating him. Also a note from World giving this location, but fear I cannot look him up just yet.

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Looked up the supply officer about getting some green feed for our horses and attended stables. The horses of the whole regiment are practically together. In the afternoon looked up at field to exercise in and also a chalk quarry for our horse standings. We then rode up to the big town near the front and saw White who is stationed there with his patrols. We saw the golden image of St Peter on the church tower which has been hit by a shell and stands out at right angles to the tower at the very top. It is made of steel as the church is a modern one. They say when it falls the Boche will win. Let us hope that it will never fall. Retired after dinner as we must have covered nearly 20 miles.

Friday 8th Sept Rode out to see a clover field that the supply officer has secured for us. A British Divisional Artillery was blocked this morning going through the village for 3 hours due to a mistake in time. It shows what a problem traffic control is in these congested areas. I saw Mr Asquith and Mr Lloyd George with the Corps commander watching a Canadian Bn march past in the road of which was one of my old RMC classmates Bodwell second in command. I also saw Allan Rankine who was with

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me at Mc Gill. A very nice chap. He is now in the medical service and with the D.M.S Corps. We looked over the ground where our horse lines are and decided the little stream would likely overflow over them in the winter so will have to look elsewhere to make our standings. Left right after lunch with Leslie for — where I met White and we rode up to a couple of the villages in front that have been figuring in the reports for the last two months. There is practically nothing left of them except a few stumps and the foundations. There is literally not one stone left standing on another. We left our horses behind a bridge and walked over it into another valley that is practically full of guns. I never saw so many of my life; large & small. It must be deafening when they all open up. A few Bush shells were coming in as the day was bright so we did not go up any further. White has patrols that ride within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of front line. Everbody goes across country. There are no communication trenches and there is no wire in front for a change. Our reconnaissance patrols run into the enemy every night and a man gets a run for his money so to speak and get a chance to hit back himself which means a lot.

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Saw Ross and Robertson of Woods Brigade on my way back. They are quite near — and out of action just at present. I told them where we were. It was really quite warm. I picked up some shell noses and visited some German trenches and dug outs which were still quite intact. There are German graves everywhere mixed with ours and in many places a big cross marks where a number have been buried in the same grave. The ground is chalk and hard to dig but I should imagine would be hard in the winter although very slippery when wet. The country is a series of ridges and valleys which give cover from view at least if not from artillery fire. Some of our patrols are called "skyline patrols" who keep people off the tops of these ridges. Was late for dinner as a 6 mile ride back but they had kept some for me. No mail again.

Saturday 9th Sept Rather cloudy in the morning and I stayed around the horse lines and helped peg out the winter standings. In the afternoon we attended a "Race Meet" just behind our village run by the Duke of Lancaster's Own Hussars, a cavalry regiment from a neighboring Corps. It was splendidly run in every way and the course was on the side of a hill and could not have been better. There were

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a great many entres and officers from all
overs but principally cavalry and I was much
impressed by their appearance. A great
deal of money changed hands. I saw one chap
get 494 francs for a stake of 5. I lost the
only bet I made. I enclose a programme.
We stayed to the end and agreed that it was
one of the best things since the war began.

There were two French ladies present from a
neighboring Chateau. They served tea afterwards
only one letter from Sarah. Our mail has
been most disappointing. Read in bed.

Markham has put a back on it and made it
quite comfortable.

Sunday 10th Sept Thank Father for life
which came, also "Boy Tractor" catalogue
I quite approve of negotiating with them and
will try and drop him a few lines about
it sometime today. Rather cloudy and damp
which makes things in a tent sticky and
wet. Must go out to stables but will add a
few lines later.

7.00 PM Am just in from a 25 mile ride
up in front. The country is simply covered
with troops and the roads dusty and hot and
grounded with traffic. Saw three large
batches of German prisoners and quite a
few others working on the roads. They all
looked fat and very fit I must say.

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Strawbenze and Smith were both with me
we were riding over 5 hours. I have just
had a good wash and feel more comfortable
no mail yet so suppose I won't get any
news today. I bought a copy of the Paris edition
of the Daily Mail however as we passed
through — of yesterday so have some recent
news to read tonight.

I am glad to be once again up to date with
my letters. Alice's letter was most interesting
but have not seen one of yours Walter for a
long time but suppose there is one in
delayed mail either direct or via Wood or
Sarah. The latter has seen quite a little of
Mrs Betty & Barbara Brown and says the
latter is coming over here to do some
work.

There is a great deal of Cavalry around here
as the Cavalry Divisions are just behind
waiting I suppose for Hindenburg to
shorten his line. I wonder if he
intends to?

Thanks Walter for the magazines
which are very welcome as I was unable
to carry any literature down with me.
The Warisons (friends of Sarah in Leyland)
have also been good about sending them.
The rumble of the guns is almost
incessant. Very much love. I'll