

AMERICAN  
Y. M. C. A.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE  
With the  
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Nov. 10, 1918  
113 F. A.  
A. E. F.

Dear Father:  
Mother:  
Frances:  
Nan:

Today the following letters came. From Father, Sept. 8, Sept. 9, & Oct. 17th. From Mother Sept. 7, Oct. 13th. From Frances Sept. 9, Oct. 12th. From Nan, none at all, but I'll include her in my answer, just for luck. All the letters were enjoyed, - how much none can know save those who have been over here for a while.

It is now 11:30 Sunday night, Nov. 10th, when all the world is waiting to see what Germany is going to do about it. I have preached four times and know I ought to be in bed, but if the Dutch should decide to say "nay, nay!" I fear we will have to smite them a lick or two, and if we do I may get too busy to write again. We are all hoping and praying that they will say "yea, yea, come over and help yourself." That is what we think they are going to say. Mayhaps the wish is father to the thought.

Your letters brought lots of news, but most of it very sad. Drake Harden's death was simply too sad for anything. His was one of the finest characters I have ever known inside or out of the army. True, fine, lovable, a high type Christian. The officers are all saddened at the news. It

seemed he was out of all danger yet he was the one to go. What a scourge that disease has made of itself in U. S. A. My own case or cases were in the "good old summer time," and consequently beside a very run down condition and a deep lingering cough I got along finely. Of course I have been entirely over it for months.

I fear my letters home have been delayed or lost. I know I wrote to you about the St. Mihiel drive, although I was careful not to infringe on censor regulations. Writing after events are cold is hard going, and writing fully when they are warm is forbidden. We are having some experiences now which might make good reading if I had the gift of writing and could tell all I know, but of course both conditions are lacking.

I saw Tom Friday for the second time in over a month. He is looking fine, and faring well. He has the best job in the army and a responsible one too. He is in the finest Observation Post on this front. By "finest" I do not refer to comforts, but to view. When a show of any kind starts in this sector he has a box seat. And he has good glasses to see it with. The music is the disturbing element. Fritzie will serenade him with High Explosives, also lately the shows have had a bad odour attached to them. I dread his being badly gassed worse than his being wounded. He has surely had one splendid chance to see this war. I hope the curtain will go down tomorrow, but I believe he wants it to continue until we pull a great big show here for his benefit. I sure was glad

to see the boy even if he did give me half a dozen letters to censor.

Monday Nov. 11, 1918.

It was after midnight when I got this far. The communique for the night came in and I went down to get the news & stayed down to talk until after one. So you see I did not get through them. Today no chance has come until now for me to finish this. The good news of the signing of the Armistice came to us by wireless about 8:00 o'clock, French time, of course. I called up Tom who was on duty and asked what was going on up there. He said six inch stuff and machine guns were going at a great rate. The firing continued right up to 11:00 when it ceased & there has been no more since then. I would like to go to the front line trenches, but have a show coming out today for two performances so must stay here for it. I am some theatrical manager now. The officers and men are delighted at the Armistice, but I think lots of us would like to have gone forward here. We know no future plans. As we are pretty near the German frontier we may have to garrison some of their towns on this side the Rhine. The speed with which Germany & her allies went to pieces has surprised us all. Now for a long table talk and then for home. I hope we do not have to garrison German towns after Peace is made in order to collect indemnity, but no one can tell about that.

I wonder if you all have gotten the letters I tried to write you about the war. Sometimes I think there is material

enough in one offensive to write a very readable article if anyone has taste and talent for such a thing. Some of the things are crude, but war is a crude business. There is one character in Battery "E", our mountain bunch, who has made an impression on me. He is cook of the firing battery. A blond of about my height and a little bonier, with clear blue eyes, uniform usually soiled from work around the kitchen. His name is Bush. His side partner, Melton, is a smaller man, and quiet. They added a third, named Currie, to form a trio. If anybody near the front gets hot coffee or cooked food Battery "E" gets theirs, and at times when others don't get hot coffee, Battery "E" still gets theirs. Being a country preacher I naturally attached myself. Bush's specialty is hot cakes. We were eating some in the Argonne one day, a day they had shelled all around Bush's kitchen, when I asked him what he did in Caldwell County. "A little of everything," he said, "blockading mostly." But he went on, with a curious look towards Captain Crayton and me, to tell how he would always take a front seat at the meetings back home from now on. The good old ladies would all say "What has come over Mr. Bush?" Someone would say "He fought through the Argonne!" Then all the good women would say "I wish all our boys had been there too!"

That night they shelled us again. We had scooped out little places on the lower side of a road. Crayton, Lt. Bonset and I were under a canvas hugging the banks, Soon we could hear

Bush's voice, and Crayton thought he might be thinking of leaving his slight protection so ordered them to stay close in. Then we heard "Currie's shot in the tail." No excitement, simply a remark. Currie then answered questions by saying he didn't think he was hurt much. When the shelling let up the investigation showed that his testament had been cut through, every leaf and both covers with a jagged fragment, his pocket book also, and he was bruised but not really hurt. All my life I have heard of testaments stopping bullets, and now when I have actually been with one who had his torn to pieces by hostile fire, he had it in his hip pocket. 'Twill be right hard to work it into a sermon.

The next day at dinner, Crayton would only allow five men to get it at a time for his battery had suffered most and he was most careful of his men. Bush was "frying hot cakes" on top of the stove. No pan, just batter on top of the stove, oleomargerine for butter, and syrup Bush had made from "olive drab" sugar. Some French long range guns about a kilometre behind us opened up. Oh! but they do make sweet music going North or East! "Got another keg," said Bush. "What's that?" I said. "Got another keg," said Bush. "Them Frogs don't shoot unless there's plenty of wine." And all our boys believe that. They take wine to French batteries just as we take water. But when our water cart arrives there is no celebration. When that big wooden keg comes up Frenchie is going to celebrate. And believe me these "Frogs" as the boys call them can sling iron. We changed positions, and Pete Crayton phoned me at Regimental that he had rounded up a big

steak, to come up to the guns and eat it with him. Bush was rigging up a broiler out of old Dutch iron. As he pattered around the stove, I asked him how it would go when we got on German soil, for we then were not expecting peace and were expecting to cross the lines soon. All of us feel that the French do not like to shoot into their towns which are held by the Germans (It does them no good to spare them, for the Huns usually destroy all they can on vacating and shell them systematically afterwards). Said Bush apropos of going on German soil, "When we get there them Frogs will shoot all the time." "How about the kegs?" I asked. "They'll pipe it to 'em," said Bush. I was reminded of that today as I passed a French battery by the road. The big hogshead of wine was there, and they were a happy bunch. But they'll not get a chance to shoot up Hun cities.

Tuesday Nov. 12.

This seems to be a continuous letter. Today I went back about thirty miles behind our lines. Those soldiers back in the S.O.S. are acting as if they won the war alone. And the Q.M. crowd et al are hastening towards the front, now that there are no shells coming over. There is a new expression on the faces of the French. A "sad joy" comes as near expressing it as any words I can use. In the exultations of their glorious victory they are thinking of those who died to make it possible. A few of the refugees are beginning to return and I heard one officer who has always been nicely billeted about ten miles behind the lines complaining because the French wo-

man in whose house he has lived for the month past has returned, and he has been ordered out. I hope we either go on into Germany to garrison towns there or stay where we are. No one will run us out of these old German positions and we could spend a pleasant winter here.

The cultivated fields back from the front looked so peaceful and so beautiful today. There in the city to which we went all was so much gayer than every before. Singing in cafes, crowds gathering to buy the papers with the terms of the Armistice in it. All were in a wonderfully good humor. The only sad picture was a big evacuation hospital I visited with its hundreds of sick and wounded, its hospital train loading to carry them back to the Base Hospitals, and its very large graveyard, many of the graves so very new too.

As we returned it was dark, with a bright moon however. The road we took was right along the front and from certain places you could see for miles up and down it. It was easy to spot it in the dark. The armies both have big supplies of rockets for signals, and the Germans were sending theirs off all along the front. For fifteen miles, we could mark the front by their fireworks. As I watched I remembered that just one month ago exactly, on Sept. 12th, at 1:00 A.M. I saw the greatest fireworks I ever saw (or heard). It was the beginning of the St. Mihiel drive. What a difference meaning the fireworks have tonight.!!' I know Tom has had quite a view of all this, and I know he will have something to write.

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a French paper. The lower one will be especially interesting to you as your younger son and brother has seen it during war and peace. You might save it for him.

This letter illustrates, not how busy I am, but how much I am interrupted. I do not know how soon the censor rules will be modified, when they are I'll tell you where I am, and what we did where.

Of course you all know that our thoughts are of home now more than ever before. The great question now is, "When will they start shipping American soldiers home," Of course we make wild guesses, and all hope we are guessing too long. April or May will about catch us at ~~home~~ home. With all love to all of you,

Yours affectionately,

Ben.

O.K. B. R. Lacy, Jr.  
Chaplain, 113th F.A.

Addressed:

Mr. B. R. Lacy,  
Raleigh, N. C.  
U.S.A.

Censored:

B. R. Lacy Jr.,  
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