

AMERICAN
Y.M.C.A.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE
with the
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

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Dear Father:

Your letter of Sept 14th has just come. You were some good guesser as to my whereabouts at that time. I wonder if you have succeeded in doing the same thing since then. When you were writing that letter on the afternoon of the 14th, I was with the forward batteries right "up there!" We had a few minor casualties that day. Since then we have seen it hotter, and from appearances will see it hotter still before "the boys go marching home." I wish I could tell you something of our movements during the last month or so. I did try to describe to you something of our life when I wrote you over a week ago. I am trying to store my mind with many things we can't put on paper, but I'll probably forget the greater part of it. Speaking of these things, Captain Fletcher wrote his wife a letter since coming to this more quiet front in which he told her many of his impressions. She was to send it to his parents so it is not a personal letter in a strict sense, and as I read it before it left here you could read it there, if you could get hands on it. As his wife is not in Raleigh, his brother, a lawyer from Fuquay Springs could probably get it for you. It is every bit as good as anything Cobb or Patullo write from over here, and almost as long.

~~I am delighted that you have sold the farm. After the War there will be times, no doubt, when we all will greatly regret it. For real estate will increase in value then, but it will be worth far more than that to get it off your mind, and settled. I am rejoiced to hear of your selling.~~

I have been greatly pleased today by requests for services on Sunday. The Batteries are all scattered along their sector of the front and already two captains and a major have requested services. Not many can gather in one place at a time so I am a very busy man on Sunday now. Last Sunday I was a little sick and it rained a great deal, but I had three fine services out in the beech forest with the leaves all turned to gold. Did you ever dream of the inspiration with such a cathedral and an artillery caisson for a pulpit. Yet how the men long to worship in church again, and hear female voices.

The other day, after four gruelling weeks of fighting and night marching, they let us march one day in the day light. It had rained all morning, but the sun came out about two o'clock and remained out all day long, that is to say until five. The men passed along through one of the beautiful valleys of France, realizing so poignantly what they had missed during those hikes in darkness. Just at sun set we met three American Red Cross Nurses, out for a walk, without hats and their hair blowing about their faces. It had a strange effect upon me to see them there, and as I looked back down that line of drivers and cannoneers I saw a smile on the face of every single one of them. And the ugliest lieutenant in France, although one of

the best a long gangling South Carolinian who enlisted in our regiment for some unknown reason and has been commissioned through merit, was the only one who had sufficient nerve or insufficient resisting power to speak to them. He left the column and ranged his raw-boned mount close to the left side of the road, and "passed the time of day" with them.

On that very same night I slept in a real bed. A sure enough bed with springs and a mattress, although I covered with damp blankets I had used in the trenches. Slept for twelve long hours too with a fellow officer who did not so much as turn over during that half day. 'Twas my one and only experience in "billeting" and after six weeks of bivouacing and trench sleeping, I like it very much. (Tub gone, I don't believe there is any in the regiment). That same night we made an old French woman cook fried potatoes for hours. Whew! but they can cook those spuds, and after canned Willie and hard tack they tasted as good as waffles and turkey hash. A dirty, greasy, cooking-room with sputtering candles making it seem darker (We were close behind a famous battlescarred city) was the dining hall of a dozen of our officers. You see Infantry comes and goes but Field Artillery seems to stay. I mean the doughboy goes in and goes to the limits. Hats off all the time to him. But a few days in hell is enough for him so he gets relieved while Mr. 75 stays there to put a barrage down or shoot up a machine gun nest for the next bunch. That is the way it looks in an offensive operation. So 'tis a long time between drinks for us.

You say write impressions. Impossible, my Father. For instance - Last night I was forward with Battery ---. Spent the night there. Saw the destroyed German guns nearby, the destroyed generator which lighted his dugouts. Ate out of his china and sat in his chair and finally slept in his bed and fought his fleas. It has been raining and misting and fogging for over a week without one ray of sunshine, or one moonbeam to break the monotony. About 10:30 I went from the dugout I was visiting in to the dugout I was to sleep in. I know a moonlight night in woods was never so glorious. It was uncanny in its beauty shining through the silver forest. As I stood there hearing the guns, neither side were firing much, I was filled with impressions. But do you think I can pin them down or pen them now. Not to save my life.

Or take another case, take today's visit to a town which a very short while ago was quite an important center for the Germans - I'll not describe the approach to it, but all along the road were German signposts, and also German gardens. The latter are the joys of our lives. The first object of particular note aside from the waterworks system which we remarked on all up above the town was the notice "Swimminbad" and then in smaller type the advertisement (I'll translate) "Air, light and sun bath." There it was, a bathing system, showers, gymnasium outdoors and a swimming pool. Then as we went through the town all sorts of thoughts and impressions came. In one of the first houses I entered, and all had been rifled with the drawers and cupboard opened and everything scattered helter

skelter on the floor and tables I saw a little wooden box almost full of marbles. I wonder where the owner is. In another a baby carriage & later others of these, and a toy automobile, not broken yet. The Germans when they first came captured the place before many of the inhabitants could flee. When they left they burned the place, or tried to, but many of these homes did not burn. The larger houses did. One could get all the stoves, chairs etc. that one desired, and we all sit in real chairs now and are really warmed. I think every man who has spoken to me about that ruined town, a town far more pathetic than those real close to No Man's Land and which were utterly destroyed and uninhabited, has remarked on the women's and children's things. An umbrella looks so strange. There were plenty there.

Another thing that strikes us anew every day is the waste of war. I saw hundreds of German shells today, and can every day now, from 3 inch up to 12 inch and also aerial bombs Piled by the way side in old battery positions. Now they are costly things. A three inch shell complete costs, they say, about \$14.00. Today I've seen hundreds of German 6 inch shells - wasted ^{thank} ~~th(r)ou(g)h~~ the Lord. But that is one small phase. Think of the waste in these reinforced concrete machine gun emplacements and gun pits. Why, they have built cities of the stuff. And the wired, barbed and otherwise, would keep in all the cattle for 3000 years. And the chicken wire used to camouflage roads, it's on the wrong side now all along here, would coop up all the chickens that have descended from Noah's original

pair. It makes a splendid bed, if the meshes aren't too big. If they are you resemble a large checker board in the morning. I slept on one of the latter kind last night. Their chief advantage is that they don't give the bugs any advantage.

I saw Tom today for the first time for several days. He had no envelopes so gave me his Christmas coupon to send home. I hope it gets there in plenty of time.

I haven't anything to do now except get about 200 letters read & censored, a job I don't like at all.

I am always thinking of everything connected with home. It would look remarkably good to me now and I hope it won't be too long before I can see it.

Give my love to all.

Your affectionate boy

Ben.

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

Addressed:

Mr. B. R. Lacy,
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Censored by
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