

AMERICAN  
Y.M.C.A.

On Active Service  
with the

AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

Sept. 21, 1918.

Dearest Loved Ones:-

You must think I have forgotten you quite. Fact is you are dearer to me than ever before in my life. We have been through some quite exciting times and we shall perhaps see other exciting times before ice and mud stops this game. Wish I could have written you when events and impressions were new, but we had no time for that. For a few days we were under a constant strain, and now we not how long we shall have even a little leisure. You read about our battle in the papers, but I imagine you little dreamed that we were in it. But we were, and did fairly well for a new outfit. We lost very slightly, no one that any of you know were even wounded. Tom was not under fire but one time and then at a distance from where the shells burst. I saw a little more excitement of that kind then he did for I went forward with the Batteries which took the most advanced positions of any in the scrap, and when shells fell among the gun crew of two batteries I helped get the wounded out. The medical boys were great and their first aid too. But even more nerve wracking was being on a crowded narrow road one night when the gas alarm was given. Then as we had our masks on and could not see, the Boche began to shell the road. Fragments were flying all around us. Luckily their range was a little long and they killed only one horse.

A battle, from the Artilleries point of view, I mean the

actual battle, is a matter of fireworks for one who can be in the open to see it, and a matter of hard muddy work for those serving the guns in the rain. Believe me, they do not let you know very long ahead when the big show is to be pulled. It had rained for a week and everybody was exhausted hauling ammunition, or thought they were, when word came down to start firing at 1:00 A.M. The men went to work like veterans and were throwing iron at the Huns for a few hours to prepare for the barrage. At 5:00 the barrage started. Already we had been having the most wonderful fireworks. Our light 75's - The heavier 155's, then the big railroad guns further behind us. It was terrific. But at 5:00 the steady barrage started. Then everything seemed to break loose, and we knew the doughboys were behind that wall of high explosives. My hat is off to the doughboys. They are the real heroes of this war. And when you admire the aviators, artillerists, etc, be sure to remember that the doughboy is the real fighter.

Our planes did fine work and 'twas comforting to see them coming over so regularly. But one right in front of our battery flew into a shell and was destroyed. They were flying so low I don't see why more did not get hit by our fire.

In the afternoon we went after the Infantry. As we struck the road from the battlefield we met ambulances and prisoners. The latter were quite contented and seemed happy enough to be out of it all. The grave diggers were going along too and 3 had just told me of our luck in having no deaths when I was told by a private by the road side that Lt. Douglas of Buffalo N.Y. had

been killed and buried in the little village. I went back to see his grave, one of three, with a bloody litter beside it. The Boche artillery had got him as he crossed an open space, killing him & a private, and wounding others. God! I cannot describe my feelings as I saw that new grave with the rude cross & tag at its head.

Then I entered the battlefield proper. Father suggested to me once to write down my impressions. 'Tis an impossibility, when you see German prisoners bringing in their wounded on litters, Ambulances riding by to relieve the litter bearers, and then the huddled heap on the ground with their rifle stuck at its head. The first dead I saw was ours. Later we came to German dead. One of ours impressed me. He was an automatic rifle man, and you could see where he had rushed to a shell hole to fire his gun at the Boches. But they got him, and he lay there, he and his rifle pointing towards the German.

Just before that point I passed five dead artillery horses and an upset caisson, and a dead driver lying near. I did not stop, but later I returned and buried him, for he was ours, our first to fall in battle. Name: Will Be Melton, Caroleen, N.C. We dug a shallow grave, and just as darkness fell we wrapped him in an extra rain coat and laid him away. What an impressive scene! A Battalion of Artillery in position near us, ambulances and artillery and machine gun outfits going by. We removed our helmets and had a single service. Then a rude cross with his identification tag and we were off to overtake the regiment. As I rode past Battery "F" Tom called out, and I knew that I loved him with a new and different love. May God spare him, is

my prayer, and I think He will.

Just as we were going for bivouac for the night, and 'twas then getting late, a corporal, Tom's friend Knapp, came to me with the news that a Captain of Infantry was by the roadside wounded. He was on a litter, but his men had given out. I got volunteers and brought him to our bivouac, got our regimental ambulance, tho' I almost had to fight our Surgeon to get it, and started to a hospital. It was a wild night, getting jammed in narrow roads, but finally I turned him over to a medical Lt. on an ambulance and got back in time to roll in my blankets about two o'clock.

The next day we could see some of the results of our battle. Went through two villages, and past innumerable German dug outs. They were certainly well fixed. We pushed on to an extremely forward position where we mingled with the Infantry which had gone forward. There we had a few casualties as I wrote about. When our troops (Infantry) first entered the villages, the French civil population, mostly women, rushed our and embraced their deliverers. They were utterly astounded to know that Americans were there, and went into ecstasy over the news.

I can't write of our movements since then. Being fired at when in gas masks as we came down that road was bad enough. One battery had found two cows, had butchered one and tried to take the other back to a new position. You should have seen that boy leading that cow at double time with shells bursting overhead, & he ran over a dead horse finally and lost the cow. I was riding a horse with a shoe off and was afraid he would go bad lame on me.

We are here, now. I can't say where.

Have not seen a person I know outside our regiment. Some one saw Tom Boushall some two weeks ago, but I did not.

Got a few letters this week and they did worlds of good.  
~~One from Frances.~~

Good night. Am holding a candle in left hand and writing on my knees.

Love, and lots of it, for you all.

Devotedly,

Ben.

O.K.

B.R. Lacy Jr.,

Chaplain 113 F.A.

Addressed:

Mr. B. R. Lacy

Raleigh,

N.C.

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Censored by  
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