

South Camp Seaford.
July 10th 1917.

Dear Clayton:-

Perhaps you will be surprised to hear from me but I have intended to write to you for some time and now that I have plenty of time I will write and thank you and the rest who sent me the box for Easter and which didn't reach me until a short while ago. The address was insufficient and it had been to about a dozen different hospitals before it reached me. I certainly enjoyed the contents and the cigarettes were fine also everything else. I am getting to be a very heavy cigarette smoker but am trying my best to cut them down a bit.

I can hardly realize that you are in the Entrance Class as you were only a lad when I saw you last. and I suppose you wouldn't know me as I have grown old since I left home. I have a nice bunch of grey hairs as souvenirs of the war and they make a fellow look much older than he really is. We have a good deal of worry but that is a trifle to the rest of a soldier's life. The only thing that we can do and are growing past masters of is grumbling and believe me we are

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experts at it.

I know Clayton, that you would sooner have me write about France and things that are of interest so I will endeavor to make this letter interesting. I am going to start with my first visit to England and take in turn the experience's I have had since I left Calgary.

The 56th Batt of Calgary arrived in England on April 9th, at 3.20 p.m. We came across the herring pond on the Oceanliner Baltic. We disembarked at Liverpool for our camp which was situated a short distance inland from Folkestone. The camp was known as St. Martin's Plains. I was some camp believe me and when the rainy season set in we were surrounded by mud and slush. I was at camp but a short time and was sent to a hospital known as Moore Barracks. It Shorncliffe and when I left there I went to a convalescent home at Epsom near London. I left Epsom on June 5th and on the 6th I was on a draft ready to go to France. We left Folkestone at 3 a.m. on the 6th and went by train to Southampton where we spent the night in a rest camp near the town. We left there for ~~La Havre~~ La Havre in France on the 7th and landed in France on the 8th.

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On our way from the docks to the rest camp where we were to spend the night we passed numerous camps occupied by Germans who were taken prisoners in the early part of the war. They were mostly Prussian Guards. (The Kaisers Bride) and they were certainly big men. When I saw the first bunch I said to myself.

"Fred if that is what you have to run against your chances are small." but I found out I was mistaken as a British soldier is equal to eight of those duds.

The camp to which we were going to was on a hill. (France is a very hilly country) and we were about all in when we got there. At the camp we were issued with the following articles, 1 Rifle, 1 Bayonet, pull through, 2 gas helmets, field dressing, ration bag, capsule of iodine, gas helmet case bayonet scabbard, cap cover and 120 rounds of ammunition in clips of five. also a rifle sling that is used to carry the rifle in anyway you please.

We left the camp for the Bath. depot on the 9th and reached a place called Steenwode on the tenth and from there we marched to where the Bath was. The Bath. had lost heavily on the 2 and 3rd of June so we were sent

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to reinforce them. We stayed there a short time and while we were there we spent the most of our time on bayonet practice and on the rifle range. From there we moved to a camp near a place called Poperinge which is about 7 miles from the front line. I with a few ~~out~~ others were detailed to stay behind to finish our work on the ranges so we missed a trip to the trenches and believe me I was sore. but I found out later that a fellow is very lucky to miss a trip. The trip to the trenches cost ~~us~~ about 20 men so we had to take their places. The ~~Butt~~ spent 8 days in on that trip four in reserve and 4 in the front line. They came back to the camp for eight days and I went in on the next trip. The trip I mentioned was tough as I lost two good chums. They were brothers and were killed by the same shell known as a whizz-bang.

My first experience was on a working party and I shall never forget it as long as I live. Fritz was only 15 yds in front of ~~2~~ us and we had to make the least noise possible. but I soon got use to it so in a short time I was what we call a 'seasoned soldier'. We put 4 days in the front line

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4 days in dugouts known as Jillebeke Burn.
and four days in the trenches at Hooge.

It was in the trenches at Hooge that I got my first wound but as the price of shrapnel was about spent it didn't do much damage. I was doing gas guard and a piece of shrapnel caught me under the right eye and on the nose. If my head had of been $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch lower I would ^{have} lost my right eye. but all I got was a slight cut and a sore nose. The Lance Corporal of my section was killed at Hooge and we lost a good man. I spent my birthday in the trenches and I didn't enjoy it very much. From Hooge we moved to a house that was known as the Belgian Chateau. It belonged to a German General and it has never been hit with a shell as long as I have known it. We were quartered in dug-out near the chateau and stayed there six days. From there we moved to T. Camp near Dickebusch a Belgian town. Stayed there a short time and then started out for our trip to the Somme. We stayed at a place called Carrell in North of France for nearly two weeks and entrained at a place near there for Contaville. Our march to the Somme took some time and we stopped at a number of ~~French~~ French towns on the way. We reached the Somme on the 13th of Sep September and were billeted on a brickfield near a place called Albert. We stayed there two days and then

we made our memorable trip of death. The 1th Brigade which consisted of the four following Batt:s. (R.C.A.) (49th) & 42nd (Black Watch) and the P. P. C. L. I. s. was to make its first attack that night went over the ridge together and as soon as Fritz saw us he opened on us with 5.9. and 9.2. shells. In our 1st Batt we lost nearly 100 men in about 10 minutes but most were wounded. I saw a fellow go up in the air minus head arms and legs but he was not the only one. The road we took was lined with wounded and dead and the ground was red with blood. The sights I saw were ghastly but one gets used to seeing men lying about in all shapes and forms. The shells were dropping all around us and the shrapnel was flying in all directions. I got a few in penetrated my clothing but that was all and I don't see how I escaped being killed. No one knows what a barrage is like until they have been through one. The cry of the wounded was terrible but we could not stop as we were hearing our jumping off trench and it meant certain death if we stopped so we kept on running. The trench that my platoon dropped in was a German trench that morning and there was plenty of rifles and equipment lying about but we took but little notice of it. There were six of the platoon &

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that I was in occupying a piece of trench that was badly battered so we started to clear it out and I had just completed a bunk hole for myself when a large shell landed on the parapet and wounded everyone but myself. One had lost an eye and was wounded in the arms and hips. Another got it in the ^{neck} ~~neck~~. The officer had a finger shattered. The other two I didn't see but one lost his right eye and the other got it in the leg. I myself had about a ton of dirt on me and I thought the end had come but by hard work I managed to clear myself. I stayed in that trench but a short time and then moved up to the next one where the rest of the Company were and reported what had happened. On the night of the 16th we occupied the front line trench and the ten hours that I put in there was the worst time I ever had. The trench was full of German dead and wounded and Fritz was shelling us pretty hard. I had then been two days without food and no sleep so I felt pretty tough. I managed to get a bit of coffee off of a wounded Fritz but it didn't ~~improve~~ improve my condition much. The casualties were increasing pretty fast but most of them were wounded. At 5. am we were relieved and I wasn't long in getting out of the place. Fritz followed us with big shells and we had to take a zig-zag course and had only three men wounded.

after we left the trench. Just before we left the trenches a shell killed a Lieutenant and two Corporals. We went out for a two weeks rest and of that two weeks we done a week on a cable trench. It wasn't much of a rest but we enjoyed it.

The next trip was a short one as it only lasted two days and it was on this trip that I got my dose. We were in reserve trenches near a place called Mouquet Farm and it was a human slaughter house. The ground was littered with German dead. I had just joined the Lewis Gun Section of B. Coy so when we were relieved ~~the~~ the gun section started out on its own and we hadn't proceeded very far before he spotted us so in a short time he started to shell us. The Lance Corporal of the section ~~was~~ another fellow and myself were together. The rest of the boys were ahead of us. I heard the report of two guns and something seemed to tell me that the shells from those guns were coming our way so I separated from the other ~~at~~ two and by that time I could hear the shells coming. I was just in the act of jumping into an old trench when one of the shells struck the ground about 10 yds behind me and I was covered with mud and blood. The concussion sent me in the air and I landed in the trench more dead than alive. I lost a lot of blood but managed to get out alright. The Lance Corp. was wounded in the chest and the other lad was killed. The Batt made another trip but I didn't go in on account of what happened. I certainly felt sick and was excused from all duties.

We left the Somme shortly afterwards and

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from there we went to Vimy ridge.

While at the Somme we captured 300 prisoners and two trench mortars and took 1600 yds of trenches. Our losses were very heavy ~~and~~ but 80 of us were wounded.

We marched from the Somme to Vimy and it took us some time. Here is a list of the places we passed through. We left Albert on the 10th of October for our march to Vimy. Before I begin ~~to~~ with our march I will give you a list of the places I was in ~~at~~ on the Somme. Pozieres. Courcellette. La Boisselle and. Contalmaison. These towns are all in ruins now and not as much as a wall standing. This is a list of the towns we passed through on our march to Vimy Ridge and if you look on the map of France you will find them in between Arras and Albert and a little west. Warloy, Contay, Tontencourt, Puchevillers, Talmas. Canaples, Gorges, Bernaville, Hem, Aubigny Aeq and St. Eloy. We were in huts at St. Eloy and it was there that we went when out of the trenches. We held a three company line of trenches not far from a town called Neuville St. Vaast. The trenches we were in were the best I have seen and it was very quiet. Our losses were very light but it was a home to the other fronts. We had good ~~day~~ dug out and that was just what we wanted.

We done did 15 days in and 5 dys. in billets the 15 days were split up as follows. 5 days in the front line, 5 in reserve and 5 in the front line. While in reserve we did working parties

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and believe me we hated them.

We had to repair trenches, dig outs and gun emplacements. Fixing the trenches was the most dangerous job of the three as a certain number had to stand on the parapet and take the sandbags that we had filled. If Fritz spotted you it wouldn't be long before he was sending shells and bullets your way. I have had a number of narrow escapes from death but one gets use to things like that so it doesn't cause much worry.

Well Clayton I expect you will think this is more like a book than a letter but I like writing long letters so hope this will prove interesting to you.

I am going on guard to-night at 4.30 p.m. so as it is now 4 o'clock I will close. Hoping this finds you in good health and having a good time. Ask Miss Duff to give my thanks and best regards to the class and to those who sent me the parcel which I certainly enjoyed. Remember me to your father and mother and Jack.

I remain.

Ever Sincerely Yours.

Fred

my address is.

St. John's Baptist.

No 447990.

P.P.C.L.I.

1st Reserve Batt.

South Camp.

Seaford.

Sussex

Eng.

P.S. You know that there
are in Belgium the
ovens with one are
in France.
Fred