

Feb. 17 1917.

My dearest, I'm still out of touch with my command. Yesterday was a calamitous day. I had an appointment to meet a despatch rider at my former P.C. But when I rang up in the morning I was told he hadn't started. I was to wait where I was for further information. Then the line was cut. I thought it possible that a mistake had been made so I went along to see if I could see anything of the D.R. While I was talking to some men near the dugouts asking if they had seen anything of him, which they denied, he was actually on the road above just starting away. I missed him by about 30" & actually saw his back riding away. He probably had letters from you. The line was not mended during the day so I could make no further arrangements, & meanwhile of course without communication I am absolutely useless here. Can you imagine anything more heart-rending? I couldn't even send you the letter I had ready. To-day if I can't get on better than that I shall walk to my headquarters, only about 8 miles from here. I'm very much out of water here. As there is no room where the Heavy Artillery are I am with some Divisional artillery not far away - simply billeted on them; and

everything is in a horrible muddle for a season
you may be able to guess. I can't bear being
without news of you & I shall be very glad to
return to a more settled way of life - as I hope
to do in a few days.

The thaw has commenced in earnest at last.
It rained slightly yesterday & today it is very
warm. The chalk cliff of the quarry announces
as by falling down in little avalanches from
time to time. I wish I could write you a happy
and interesting letter. ^{start here} One person here interests me
the Commandant. The first time I saw him he came
into the office before dinner, where his two young
subalterns were sitting, one of them at that moment
talking on ~~the~~ telephone. He is very tall & thin
& was wearing a long dark blue military cloak &
over his head & neck a strange blue helmet - a fair
man with light blue eyes, his head small & his
expression very kind with something very spiritual
about it arising chiefly I think from the cross-cut
around his eyes. He came in quite quietly & then a
minute afterwards began shouting in the little tunnel
at the top of his voice giving instructions to the
subaltern at the telephone who evidently wasn't
doing things in the way he liked. I never heard such

a noise about so little or experienced such a sense of confusion created; but it all subsided as quickly as it had arisen & a moment after the young officers who seemed to be shaking in their shoes before were smiling affectionately, while the Commandant was laughing. It was a scene straight out of Dostoevsky! The following morning I heard him singing for their happiness in his dug-out. "He's always singing they said 'and he has a lovely voice' when he is singing, perhaps: but not when he's speaking on the telephone, indeed whenever he speaks he becomes excited almost at once and shouts at the top of his voice. And yet I think he must be a very nice man.

The more I see of the French the more on the whole I feel their disappointment with us. Of course they are ready to say plenty of nice things about our army - quite sincerely I mean. They readily admit that our men are magnificent soldiers. But they have a sense of always waiting for us. They are war-weary - not at all discouraged, but bored. It was a great disappointment that we couldn't get on faster on the Somme, where

they were always ahead of us, obtaining their
objectives & then waiting. And they are disillusioned
they have so often had great hopes & been disappointed
and here

Dearest one, you may imagine how I have
been thinking of you all these days. It's no good
saying I wonder this, I wonder that. I shall know
the answers soon I hope. I'm sure you must have
had a lot of trouble & it is because I have had sad
visions of you more especially that it has so hurt me
to have no letters.

Goodbye Your loving
George

I have got to bid you - received two letters Jan 20 - Feb 4.
My dearest I am sorry you are ill - more distressed than
I can say. I hope when I next hear you will be quite
better. The General has gone out & put another package
in his pocket in the hope of seeing me - so perhaps
I shall get them if he comes in before I go back.
I suppose your father is all right as your last letter
says nothing about it.

Goodbye
George

