

April 17 1917

My dearest Ruth,

No letters from you have reached me for some days - & I have had no time to write to you either. The day before yesterday I spent at the O.P. The time for starting is 5.15 a.m.; it is light by then, but not broad daylight - but I suppose sunrise is about 6.0 a.m. It was a beautiful morning - rather cloudy however. I was very busy for some time looking about me & making out the country which I had ^{not} seen before from that point. I saw a number of Huns working on some trenches in front & showing themselves against the skyline - I believe they do this sometimes in the pretence that they are holding a place strongly. Anyway my battery wasn't allowed to fire at them & eventually it was nearly two hours later when a heavy battery was tacked on; they only fired very few rounds & did no good, so that was disappointing.

I then went into a neighbouring wood, leaving the signaller, to explore it with a view to establishing an O.P. there - I didn't at all like the place which Hutchinson & Johnston had used before because it was a favourite

target of the Huns & the dug-out which we have made up there is 150 yds away so that one might easily get caught. The wood is a pitiful sight - practically all the trees cut down. Still it gives me the feeling of a wood; it has the special soft touch of ground under trees & green things are beginning to carpet the floor already - these were plenty of wood anemones out, and primroses too, only they turned out to be oxslips - is that possible - a primrose leaf & a primrose coloured flower, but hydro-headed. In a hidden spot behind a great fallen trunk I ate breakfast. I lit a very small bright fire so that the Hun couldn't possibly observe the smoke, & boiled the water for my coffee on that; the sandwiches fried on the embers - They were very good.

In the course of the morning I found two or three good O.P.s in the wood & had a wire laid. Got into touch with two infantry officers the night before & reported a heavily wired trench - I then went to a spot some distance away through the wood & over the fallen trees to find somewhere whence it

could be seen but could see nothing of it - probably they had told me a wrong direction.

The morning was lovely - soft & springlike in spite of some rain; but in the afternoon there was a sudden change of weather. The wind got up from the north & it soon began to rain very heavily. We had to fire on a so-called strong-point reported by infantry before their attack which was due to begin at 9:30 p.m. the same night; their information was very vague; I spent some hours trying to get at something more definite from different infantry officers; but no one knew anything about it except a certain colonel I was told - I had a weary hunt for him but he was not due to arrive till later in those parts. Eventually we fired at a different target; we had a very cold experience observing in the rain from about 4:0 to 7:0. Just then to find the infantry colonel with whom I was ordered to keep in touch during the attack. He seemed an agreeable man - quite young - I should say not more than 35; he asked if he might use our dug-out near the O. Pas his advanced Hqs. So of course that was

arranged. After this the night consisted for me in two spells (1) when I stood for about 2½ hrs. on the bank of a sunken road looking for a signal which I ought to have seen after ¼ of an hr. (2) A confused congestion in the dugout, where I found, when I came in about midnight, after the signal, that the 2nd in command of the infantry btn. had established himself & it was evident that he had completely lost his head. As a matter of fact the attack had been a great success, though those who had waited didn't know that till sometime later. Our part in the affair was to bombard a certain area after the signal went up, but I think our chief use was as a channel of communication. The infantry telephone business was badly managed - but they also had all luck in getting their line cut - or rather we had very good luck in keeping ours intact. Any way our wire was very useful in sending back their messages. Needless to say the Hun didn't take our attack lying down & he

chose to bombard our sunken road. He put up a very hot barrage shortly after I began my vigil & I spent about 10" lying against a muddy bank; I was always expecting him to repeat the dose, but for some reason he didn't begin again until just after our signal had gone up. The little dug-out, not yet completed & only 6'x5' had seven or eight people in it all night - mostly sitting with their legs hunched up & vainly trying to tuck away their feet. I spent most of time between midnight - dawn in there, sending through messages to my own people & to the infantry. Luckily I hadn't been wet though as my British Warm kept out most of the rain; I was a bit damp in parts & it was a chilly occupation from first to last as there were considerable intervals with nothing doing, but it was much worse for my two signallers who besides being much damped had to take turns in staying outside to relieve the congestion in the dug-out. To me the most interesting part of the show was the work of the various runners who seemed very efficient in finding their way to & from the attacking companies & were the sole means of communica-

w/2 them. They handed their messages into the
dog-out & the infantry captain then sent
them out so that I was able to see the
mine workings which interested me very
much.

I got back here about
7.0, not at all exhausted & had a busy
morning; in the afternoon I went to
my hut to lie down & slept till dinner
time, when I found that the ration
boss had come & gone - which explains
why I didn't get off a letter to you.

Last night was the funnest we've had for
a long time - a violent north wind & very
heavy rain. The roof of our hut leaked
like a sieve, but I saw the flap of my
valise right over me & slept quite warm
& undisturbed. The morning was very
misty too, but it is brightening up now.

I'm hoping for a fine day to-morrow when
I shall be at the O.P. again. By the bye I
did ask you to get me refills for a Tommy's
cooker didn't I? I expect they are on the
way. but we haven't had a parcel mail

for some days. I must try & write one or two other letters now. Love to you always.