

Thursday July 6

[628 July 1916]

My dearest Ruth, My note of this morning turned out almost a letter - nevertheless it seems that I've got a great deal of information & this is a chance of supplying it. I am taking Quinn's place at the guns for a very slow job, as, owing to certain rearrangements, he is superintending some more digging work. It is now 3:15 1/2 & we have to fire off 60 rounds or so by 9 pm - so you may imagine how slow I feel this job to be. I am sitting beside the one gun which is to fire.

How much have I told you already about the recent fighting. I have an idea that much remains to be said but I hardly know what. The conditions just here are very different from those when the

Scrap began. That day was one of
suspense and excitement; a contin-
ous flow of tales from collected from
wounded men walking down the road
kept us informed of what was going
on & one made out a story partly
true. But now the intense fighting
is south of us & though we may still
support the infantry as we did yester-
day. It is not apparently those on
our immediate front & they don't
evacuate their wounded along this
road. So we feel a trifle 'out of it'.
Possibly that state of affairs won't last
for ever. And for us the salient
fact is that we are no longer working
out a prearranged plan matured perhaps
months ago, but rather plans formed in
a day to fit the occasion. Consequently
we have little warning and often
have to open fire at a moment's notice.

This is what you would expect - but none the less a condition of action that makes severe demands on everyone; so many things have to be considered that for perfect accuracy there must always be a short delay before the figures worked out in the office from the map can be telephoned through to the guns; & then the 'Nos. 1' or 'Gun Captains' as they are called in coast defence have to be made to understand the figures & it's wonderful how difficult that process seems to be in some cases & how often they make mistakes. And then before ~~the~~ the gun can be fired it has often to be turned about in a confined space & on muddy ground - So that altogether you may imagine that when we are ordered to open fire at once on XYZ it requires a cool head to avoid agitation & that's just what Lithgow hasn't got - he has a cleashead & can work

quickly & accurately, but when he comes along in a tremendous flutter to inquire why the guns aren't ready it requires some presence of mind to keep cool oneself. It must be added that Lithgow has been better in this respect ~~of~~ during these last two days - and we have been quicker on the guns too. My impression is that our Nos 1 are not a very adaptable lot and don't easily scent themselves to new conditions; also some of them have not had sufficient training & two are capable of any folly.

We never let them fire the 1st round of a series without making certain that they have the right angles on the sights, so no serious mistakes can be made that way.

These remarks from the mark // are written on Saturday morning

I'm glad to say that during the incessant firing of yesterday all went well. I only had two guns to look after during the most exacting periods instead of four as often happens when I am on duty; it is a much better arrangement to have an officer for each section when we have to fire all guns rapidly at an exacting target, & I find no difficulty in taking charge of them properly; but four in a space of 120 yds along that shipping bank & in the din of traffic & field gun fire - are a handful.

Well, my dearest one I had a pretty hard time before I turned in last night. My day off duty turned out more laborious than usual in the end. From the time I stopped writing this letter, because the work on the

Guns suddenly 'bucked up'; I hadn't a moment's rest till 4 a.m. when I lay down for an hour & a half. And then began a day ~~in~~^{beside} which the rest of the offensive appears as a mere whiff of smoke - I refer only to our own experiences; but so far as artillery is concerned the whole attack must have been far more vigorous. It certainly seemed to be so judging from what we heard here - that was partly because we heard so very much more than we liked of certain field guns which fired over our heads, but there was far more big gun fire too on this sector. The infantry were to attack at 8.0; the bombardment began soon after 7.0 & this battery had to open fire at 7.20. Before that the guns had to be calibrated - i.e. to fire on a known point with the particular lot

of cordite which ~~the~~ each separate gun
was to use - so as to get any correction
for elevation or line which might be
required; and as there was a difficulty
about communication from the observed
position involving the use of signals -
(flag waggling / known as the 'flapper')
with Morse Code - we had to start that
operation at 6 a.m.

It's no use attempting a detailed descrip-
tion of yesterday. We were firing all
day - but the strenuous parts of the
day were up till 11:0 a.m. & from about
3:30 p.m. to 9:0 p.m. I was on the guns all
the time except when I was relieved
for meals. The operations appear to have
been successful & again we see groups
of German prisoners passing periodically,
- as a gunner remarked to me 'a
mixed lot like our own; some fine
soldiers & some that look as if they
could hardly hold a rifle - & they all look

as though they were straight from
prison's

I think I must have been very tired
yesterday - that such variable moods.
Mostly I was very happy & in the slack
time after lunch sitting on a pile of
empty cartridge boxes, banded on at
intervals, I had a notable idea for
a book - really quite the most
pleasing idea I have ever had - a form
which would give me scope to say all
that I wish to say about Life & Ethics &
Education quite pleasantly & humour-
ously. I will tell you more about it
if it occupies my thought any more.
On the other hand I was very nervous.

I read your letters in bed last
night & that was a great joy - four
of them & half of one of my own!
I'm very glad you get your friends
& mine down to what broke - it is

Very agreeable for them & good for
your family too. Middelst seems to
be delighted by Mary Ann & Ursula
- our discovery - has been embraced.
I should love to have seen your father
with the 'The ~~Philosophy~~ Professors' - an
appropriate nickname. It's a great
matter of luck & first impressions
whether such meetings 'come off',
but I'm not in the least surprised
& I think it's creditable to your father
- there's a good deal for an older
man to put up with in Owen.

I am interested in your account
of the meeting you attended - Please
tell me exactly what you said in your
brave speech! I'm delighted to hear
that you spoke. But I'm altogether
'assomme' as the French say - knocked
down by your calm assumption
- that I am just a Christian - this

after how many months of
musical life? I'm blawed if I've
the energy to write you another
philippic proving how good a Xian
soul I am. I always thought your
own standard a high one & couldn't
expect to live up to that, but if
it's not high enough to let a poor
humble summer like me into the
fold it must be damnably low &
at all events I can say I've more
respect than that for Christian teaching
so there!

And I won't write any more
not in this spasmodic perhaps
hater in the day. But will
this letter ever reach you?

I suppose we shall meet again
one of these days - perhaps for a
period things will be more quiet
& then! But it does seem distant.
Ever so much love - gr. Irving Cross

Saturday July 7