

France,
Thursday, May 25.

My dearest Ruth,

I've had such a batch of letters from you these last two days - all those forwarded on from Harste except those you addressed to Poste Restante, Harfleur - that I seem to be living in plenty like an empress. I have them all arranged in order now & know their contents pretty well. Dearest one, they give me no end of pleasure; - no end of thoughts about you. I'm first going to try - answer some of your queries & answer some of your remarks.

To go right back to the coming from Southampton, no submarine attacked us so far as I know, though we were all prepared for submission each man with a life-belt. I couldn't tell you anything which would give away our time of arrival - perhaps that remark may enlighten you?

I see you have a very imperfect view of my life here if you can imagine that I share a bed sitting-room. In one cottage he has a first-floor bed room, the parlour ^{towards} ~~over~~ the street is our mess room - our living room in fact - & the back room is our kitchen. In another cottage

the corresponding room to the mess room is my
bedroom - the only habitable room in the house
[incidentally the Hun put a shell through the back of
the house last evening which didn't touch my
bedroom; this needn't alarm you; he wouldn't
do that in the night; and though billets are
always liable to be shelled very few casualties
come that way - bricks - mortar are a large
measure of protection against anything under
5.9 shell & the Hun doesn't spend those -
billets: besides me clears out.]. In a third
house we have a room known as the office & it
is dignified by a large scale map hanging on the
wall & flavoured, so to speak, by figures & instru-
ments. So you will see that we live upon
a more extended scale than you seem to have
supposed. About 50 men, that's half the battery
minus certain 'specialists', occupy one side
of a small street; a few peasants, mostly
old women whom one sees trooping by to their
cellar whenever it gets lively, still hang
on, but except for them the street is ours &
plenty commodious for us in spite of its
imperfect repair. Another peculiar circumstance

is my servant; so far as I know he has no other duty but to wait upon my wants. As luck would have it he is a very good man for the job - a trained manservant; I suffer more valeting than I altogether like, but I must admit it's a very comfortable arrangement & he does very well for my personal equipment - never were my boots so assiduously cleaned!

I ought to have told you more about the battery or rather about a battery, for the general idea is the same for all. It has four guns (beautiful new ones ours are with all the latest devices); and each gun is served by two detachments which are 'on duty' for the week by turns. Our arrangement down here at present is somewhat of a compromise; either Bell or ~~myself~~ myself is on duty likewise for the week & is responsible for everything: but at the same time each has a special interest in one gun (my gun is No. 4) & is supposed to be more or less responsible for training its detachments, and if one of us is conducting a shoot as Section Commander (as such is half a battery) the other if he is on the premises will be looking after his own gun: but on the other hand he needn't be there at all. I am rather

Sorry at present to have dropped out of the battery work
as I so long have dropped out. This night to be my week
on duty & with the changing of the positions etc. I
should have had a valuable experience; as it is I'm
left in charge here to-night because Bell was
wanted up at the Right Half - no doubt to discuss
these great changes.

You will have gathered
I have little time left now for duties at the battery.

Yesterday I hadn't a moment for writing to you
- so that since my last hurried note I have

done a day shift, a night shift & again a day shift
at my bricks & mortar work. Well, dear Ruth,
I'm quite keen about this curious undertaking.

You'll want to know first how dangerous it is; - we
did have rather a warm ten minutes yesterday. The
men were shelled out before I arrived - which means
that on the approach of shells ranging on the form
they departed with the usual safety of 9999 parties
in 10000. I met them in the fields & there it
became as they say here 'warm'. Our movements
were hurried & more than once our bellies were
against the ground. You have to realise that
for wise men who either lie down or take
cover casual shelling is not very dangerous;
H.E. unless they're very big have almost to hit

To reassure you - since this work began nearly a month ago the parties
have had no casualties.

You to do much damage & Shrapnel are quite unlikely
to get you unless you're quite unprotected in the
open - even to be behind a tree is usually good
enough. An adventure like ~~the~~ ours of yesterday
alarms me very little either at the moment or
afterwards - though I intend to take every
precaution. Yesterday then began with excitement;
it was perfectly calm ~~just~~ afterwards. My business
is to get the work forward with all possible speed; I
do a lot of work myself, carrying bricks in sandbags,
knocking the mortar off them, supplying the layers
and encouraging the faint-hearted. Enter amid
these scenes of bustling activity yesterday afternoon
a general & two staff officers - with very complimentary
words to me for 'setting the men a fine example'
& much cheering all round. To-day two visits
from generals - so you see - I shall have a
D.S.O. at least in a fortnight. Evidently this is some
pet scheme. Last night we had a dirty job; - the
shed in which we work was half-full of straw
which caught the general's eye yesterday who
ordered its removal in a case a shell should fire
it. How many times my grasping arms in the dark
embraced the dusty straw I should be sorry to guess.

Suffice it say that the barn was made to explode
straw like an exploding sausage & busy hands
were pulling it out & laden figures bearing
it away for half the night till the barn was
empty - & so home by the slow texture of
a motor lorry on paved roads.

I was rather late starting this morning -
9.30 or so & then suffered a puncture before
I was out of the town - so that I was later than
I would wish; they were a large lot of men to-day
(different men are detailed each day from the two
batteries of the brigade, but the N-C.O goes on for
a week); but we got a move on & had quite a
lot done when the generals came & they were
quite pleased.

So much about my work - & now I must leave
off for to-day with a request for tea (the B'head
sort will do quite well). In my next I will tell
you what I think about the photos. Anyway I'm
delighted to have two real good ones of you.
Now Good Night dear with all my love.

Yr. ever loving
George.