

May 26 Friday 1916

France. 1

My dearest Ruth, It's a great joy to have your letters when I sit back in the afternoons. To-day I had two - the latest written on Tuesday. It is queer to think of you at B'head - a feeling so many of the same things that have brought themselves to my notice there. It is certainly a peculiarly difficult house to live in, but also highly amusing sometimes. I'm glad it is cheerful just now. And isn't ~~great~~ Birkenhead quite pastri-  
cularly ugly! On a wet day! how unrelieved the sordid sin of its very existence!

I'm not feeling very fresh this evening. Last night was unpleasant. We have to carry our stuff at night over some very rough ground; and with rain it speedily becomes extremely slippery. I thought myself very lucky last night to get off with only one fall in the mud in two journeys to the farm. It rained a good deal - but I didn't stay to the end as I wanted to start early this morning - the men made two more journeys after I left. I shall have to go out again to night to see that the new N.C.O.

for the week [which now begins odd] enough  
on Friday night] knows his work. I shall have  
another to deal with to-morrow & I know he's  
not much good - a bad look out for the following  
week - so much depends on a capable N.C.O to  
keep the party going.

I was back here about 4.45 to-day after some  
tiresome trouble over cement - in time to eat  
a slice of excellent cake for tea - please  
tell Mother it's a great success. There was  
shooting in progress here, very much hump  
up by the appearance of enemy balloons -  
stationary now some miles away - but  
still quite able to observe a flash: it is  
to avoid being seen by them that we have  
provided the new positions, but for some  
reason they were not in use to-day. Bell  
was observing & Lithgow was taking my  
place; I went out to talk to him - he is a  
very nice man & humorous - but very  
indecisive in my opinion. I've just been  
interrupted by a telephone message from R+ Half  
saying that the Pay Sergeant is coming down

& I have to write pay - half an hour's job I should think. Anyway I didn't intend to write you much of a letter - I'll leave that till I'm fresher & have more time.

I had a quiet day at the Farm, & the works getting on fairly well. My part seems chiefly to be the demolition of a certain wall in order to get bricks & it takes me a lot of work to provide enough: but it's worth while because they are so much better than any I could get from other sources & saves carting & carrying besides. No Hun shells in our direction to-day.

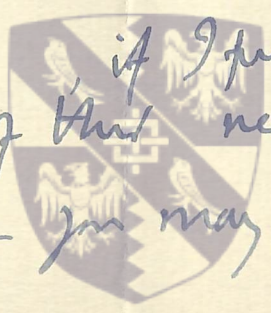
I'm not sure that Ralph ought to tell you where I am; half the trouble is that military information is found out in England.

However since he's told you the beat of the 2<sup>nd</sup> army & you mentioned this place A. by name

- just in France if I further tell you that my work is N. of that near a famous place

P in Belgium - you may now know all you

Amendities?  
Ploegsteert? (plus 2 more)



want. But to please keep it to yourself as far as possible. No one who knows the number of my battery ought to know where it is & if it hadn't seemed fairly certain that you would eventually find out through Ralph I wouldn't have told you.

Saturday - So you see I didn't get it finished.

An evening off - I'm very glad of it. Last night was rather tiresome. No N.C.O. turned up & I had to do a good deal of rounding up of unknown men in the dark. However supplies are going pretty well & to-day's work was very good. The colonel who is very kind & encouraging came along this morning & was very pleased. I think 3 weeks more if we don't get hung up for want of anything vital will pretty well see the end of the job.

You ask in your letter received to-day why the town doesn't get shelled systematically. The first answer to that is that it requires such a lot of shells unless very big ones - 9.2 or 12 in are used. It's astonishing after one has seen a place apparently battered to pieces how comparatively little damage has been done; of course roofs

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lose their tiles at once & the inside of a house  
looks uncomfortable to inhabit - plaster & bricks  
dust over all the place - but beyond a few  
holes in the walls & perhaps certain of new  
passages between ground floor & blue sky a house  
is still a house unless it has received a quite  
extraordinary measure of 'hate'. In this town  
- particularly, as you might expect, at its eastern end  
quite a number of houses are more or less ruined  
& the Hun continues to mete out more or less  
mild doses. We get some shells near here & if  
things seem to be too warm we retire to safer  
places; if very big stuff began to come over we  
should take refuge in our dug out. Sometimes  
it is quite noisy here. To night the Hun has been  
shelling what he takes for a battery position  
over the river with 5.9; that went on pretty  
strenuously for about 2 hrs; very often salvos  
of three shells came over; the fragments were  
falling (quite harshly) in the street here.  
I watched the shooting from the end of the street  
for some time; there is plenty of time to take  
cover ~~fast~~ after observing the burst. The shooting  
was poor to night & I was soon tired of watching.

I'm not in the least bit nervous yet - we haven't been badly shelled. One constantly hears the long crescendo whistle & bang or the quick whiz-bang; the ear becomes unconsciously trained in almost no time to note the changes of tone & observe the approximate distance of bursts, & one just goes about one's business without worrying about such things. Our own guns going off make a nasty crack sometimes & if one isn't expecting the report one may jump. This afternoon after tea I visited a half-ruined Church near here with the idea of finding out whether its scattered bricks would be worth casting to my building; I was standing under the foggy tower & viewing the inside from the West archway when suddenly there was a bang all round as though I were the centre of a great battle - it was only our anti-aircraft guns! but I got away from that tower very quickly. I don't dream of guns or war or anything of the sort - just the old absurdities; and the most terrific noise I have heard since I've been out was made by two cats ~~on the roof~~ which woke me up in the middle of last night - Damn them they quite frightened me.

I feel so comfortable to-night in my silk shirt! And you'll be interested to hear that I shaved off

my mustache - all except a little tuft in the middle  
- before dinner to-night. Bell agrees that my appear-  
ance is improved; in fact I feel quite a handsome  
fellow.

Dearest one I do like to have  
my photos of you; they give me pleasure each  
time I enter my bedroom. I can't go into which  
ones I like - I haven't the energy. I suppose  
I am to keep the lot? Not that I have any  
desire to keep those of me - which I think  
a poor lot on the whole, artificial & unsat-  
isfactory in focus; for instance one taken at my  
suggestion with my chin resting on my hand  
is bad because the camera is focused on the  
lower part of the face so that the jaw looks  
bigger than the head & I'm not allowed a forehead,  
- at least it appears so to me. And most of the  
faces lack modelling - particularly that with  
a slight smile looking straight into the camera.  
On the other hand modelling is a particular  
good point in most of the photos of you.

I heard from Mr Allen to-day - but I'm not  
going to tell you any more news to-night because  
I want my bed. Dear one I would you  
were here with me - you could share such a

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lot ; & you would so much have enjoyed by j -  
pudding dish with me to-day - in a French shop  
naturally.

They seem to be very busy in  
the trenches to-night. Silly old war - that's  
what one can't help feeling out here - what is the  
good of these fellows making that silly war. It's  
all so desultory. Everyone feels it.

Well Good Night my dear one. I'm sure you're  
behaving in the most amiable way. I salute your  
image with many kisses - everywhere -

Yr. ever loving,  
George.

