**Preface: This transcript was sourced online from the Canadian Letters & Images Project.**

**-Editor**

July 19th, 1916

Sarcee Camp,

Calgary, Alberta.

Dear Dave: -

Like most friends, I write only when in trouble, or when looking for favors. But I couldn't think of any one else with whom I could trust this little matter. I should have attended to this before I left Edmonton, but I didn't have the money to do it with. Could you go to the Farney Truck Co. on 101st and see about shipping Mrs. Weltzels (Miss Rice) trunk for me? I don't know anything about shipping, so I shall have to rely on you. I'll tell you all the particulars I can. In the first place, the Farney Truck Co. have it in storage on 101st St. It is not a large trunk, and has "Lou A. Rice" marked on it with ink. It is very faint, so you may have some little trouble finding it. Another oversight on my part, I didn't get a storage check for it. I understand that the trunk will have to be crated before the Railway Co. will take it. The Farney Truck Co. promised to have that done before it was shipped. Mrs. Weltzel wants it shipped by freight to Windsor, Ont. where she is going to call for it. So I suppose it will have to be marked "To be called for" eh? You know she is in Detroit, so it's only a short trip to Windsor. If there are any papers or receipts to go to her, send them to me and I'll pass them on.

In case you require her right address, I'll give it to you, but I can't trust the Truck Co. They may send her an empty one, or a wrong one.

I hope you are all well at home, and getting enough to eat. Tell the girls, I could eat almost as fast as they can cook. We get very few home-cooked meals down here.

Say Dave, could you give me a job on your farm, harvesting? I'm going to ask for a pass this Fall, and may go to the "Wheat Belt" in Sask. with some of the boys, unless I can find a good place nearer home.

We don't know what we are going to do this Fall. One hears so many different rumours. Some claim that we are going from here as soon as our "Musketry Training" is over. I'm game for whatever comes. Anything to help finish this D\_ War.

I am doing pretty fair in my class as a "Scout". Of course I have to work & study hard, but it is so interesting that a fellow doesn't mind.

Here's hoping this letter finds you all in good health.

Regards to Minnie and all the children.

Yours,

Alex.

Sarcee Camp,

Calgary.

Oct. 4th, 1916

My Dear Sister,

Received your welcome letter yesterday and must hasten to apologize for having neglected you. I have been too busy to write for the past 4 weeks. You know I intended going up to Edmonton the latter part of August but stayed here waiting for my money for over a week and finally had to go without it. I didn't have enough to take me to Saskatoon as I first intended. You know the Government only paid our fares for 300 miles. So I went to Red Deer, I worked there till the last of September and came back here last Sunday. I struck a poor district as I wasn't able to get more that $2.00 a day, and believe me I had to work. I was so tired nights that I didn't even wash myself, but went straight to bed. I suffered quite a bit from rheumatism in my left shoulder too, being out in the rain so much. I had to help in all the chores and it was generally 9:30 or 10 before we got through. Then farmers are generally very early risers during harvest. Sundays I usually was only to glad of a chance to lay down and rest my weary bones. I tell you Sis, it was no picnic. When I got back to camp last Sunday everything was covered with snow and it snowed all Monday and Tuesday. Today is the first time we've seen the sun since coming back, and it hasn't been any too warm either. I don't know what they are going to do with us yet. Nobody knows for that matter. I wish I could find out. I was wondering if Mother could come up to Edmonton for a few days if I send her the money to pay her expenses. It would require almost a week's leave for me to go to Battleford and I'm almost certain that I can't get a weeks leave. I may be able to get three days, I could easily come up & see you both in that time. If I was sure we were going to stay in Canada for the winter, I wouldn't worry because I could get longer leave. I wish you would write me as soon as you get this letter and say whether it would be advisable or not to send for her. I could spare about $25.00 if you think that would be enough. I think I'd sooner go without leave and take the consequences as go away without seeing her. I'd have gone to see her before I came back from harvesting only that everyone was so sure that we were not going to England this winter. But since coming back here, all the talk is about getting ready to go across. We heard that the camp was to be broken up about the middle of this month, and now they say that we are to stay here till the first of November and then go across. One hears so many different tales, that it is next to impossible to place on anything. So to be on the safe side I thought of sending for her if you thought it advisable. I have not heard from Alfred since that time, just before he left to go to Sewell Camp. Our Colonel told me that he had received a letter from Alfred's Colonel and that he was giving the matter his consideration. If I don't hear something soon, I'm going to make some more noise, maybe they have forgotten the matter.

I don't think Ben could have enlisted without us knowing about it, because he would have to come through Edmonton, I hope he has not. I think two DeCoteaus are enough for the Army.

We all had to make out our wills the other day, so that looks as if we must be going pretty soon, doesn't it? I made out my will to you. I have not assigned my money to any one yet. You know when we get to England they give us only half our pay. The other half is kept in trust for us in some Bank, unless we assign it to some person who will keep it for us. So I am going to make over half my pay to you before we leave Canada. You can leave it in the Bank till I come back or (go where I won't need it). Of course if you should need any of it before I do, I've no objection to your using some of it. I suppose the proper thing to do would be to leave it to mother, but then she can't read or write and I'm afraid they would take advantage of her if they wanted to be crooked. And by the stories going around some poor fellows have a hard time getting what's coming to them. Of course, Sis, if anything happens to me and I fail to come back, don't forget poor mother. I haven't much to divide but I should like her to have a little. I did not consign my (money) pay to her because I figure on coming back and will need some money and am afraid she couldn't keep my money as well as you could. I hope the tone of this letter has not given you the blues, Sis. My reason for writing this, is because one never knows when the authorities may take a notion to give us our marching orders. The 151st I understand had only 60 hours notice before they left here. One can't do very much in that time. We might get our orders to move tomorrow and we'd be so very busy packing for the rest of the time that I'd have no time for writing.

We Sis, remember me to Grannie when you see her. I hope to be able to come up in person and see her before I go.

Am glad to know that you are all well and hope you are doing well in business. I have been pretty well myself since my last letter to you, except that little touch or rheumatism, but then I wouldn't be in style if I didn't have it. They all have it down here, more or less. I can't write you much more tonight Sis, as I'm not a bit too warm. Some nights we have to sleep with our clothes on. They have issued two more blankets to each man, but I was on duty in town yesterday, and so did not get mine yet. We bought an oil stove for our tent the other day but it costs too much to keep it going all night, so it keeps me busy nights rolling over trying to dodge Jack Frost. It wouldn't be so bad if we had a warm place to eat our meals in, but it's kind of tough when a fellow had to eat with his over coat on. Oh well I s'pose it will be warmer in the next place.

Oh before I forget, where is Billy Rees now? I didn't answer his last letter and he hasn't written to me again. He was thinking of going away to some place then.

Well Sis, remember me to Dave and the children. I do hope to see you all before long, If only for a little while. Be good to yourself and don't work too hard.

As ever,

Your loving brother

Alex

P.S. Don't say anything to mother about my making my will out to you. She would be offended. Better let her think I have nothing to my name.

France,

July 2nd, 1917

My Dear Sister,

Just a few hurried lines to acknowledge your letter of 30th May, which I received a few days ago. I have been putting off my writing until a favorable opportunity presented itself, but I'm afraid I won't have much leisure for some time to come.

I am quite well at present and hope to be for some time to come. This is a good healthy life, and all the boys are in the pink of condition. We have been getting just enough work to keep us in condition, plenty to eat & lots of sleep.

I'm very sorry to hear that you've had so much illness at home, Sis. I sincerely hope that the children are all well by now. You certainly do seem to be unfortunate, in having the youngsters take sick one after another like that. I wish I had left a "sister" with you to help you look after the little ones.

You silly girl! to worry about Benny. He'll never be taken from you. Not for this war anyhow. The whole show will be over before he's of age, and then, I don't think we'll ever see another war after this one. I'm afraid that you've borrowed mothers habit of worrying. Cheer up girlie, we'll all come through some how. Don't cross your bridges before you come to them.

I'm sorry to hear of Gladys being forced out of work. I wish I could be of some assistance to her, but you know, I get barely enough to keep me in tobacco now. It's the lies of "him" that conscription should apply to.

Jessie's letter hasn't reached me yet, it may have got lost. I think some of mine must have got lost too, because I've written more than one letter. I know Julia hasn't received some of mine yet. Goodness knows what happens to them, because they are returned to the writer when he won't pass them.

I'm glad to hear that mother is still well. I hope she isn't worrying herself to death over her useless boy. I haven't heard from her. If you see Grannie tell her that I saw her two grandsons, Jack & Gordon, Helen's brothers. We are in the same unit. Gordon hasn't been extra well. Of course you needn't tell her that. The old lady can't stand any extra worries you know. Jack seemed bright and cheery. Kindest regards to Grannie and Helen.

Remember me to Helena, Gladys and Effie. Tell them I'm writing them at next opportunity.

Oh! about that couch that George Moore wants, you may sell it to him at whatever price you think fit, and keep the money for yourself.

I'm sorry I wasn't able to make any arrangements about my money before I left for England. So you'll have to see to it yourself if "my number is called". I have over $100.00 to my credit now.

Well sis, I shall have to close now and go back to work. It may be some time before you hear from me again so don't worry over my silence.

Many thanks for the snapshots. With love to all the children. Kind regards to Dave. Hope he's doing well. For yourself kindest wishes and love.

Your affectionate brother,

Alex

#231462

49th Canadians,

B.E.F.

France

France

Sept. 10th, 1917

My Dear Sister,

Received your very welcome letter yesterday and was very glad to know that you were all well. I also received the parcel some time ago and you may be sure the contents were very welcome. The tobacco came in handy as I was broke and without tobacco. I should have written at once and thanked you, but I was very busy at the time and kept putting it off. Then I was taken ill with trench-fever, and didn't leave my bed for ten days. I am about over it now, though my legs still pain at times, especially during wet weather. It's just like rheumatism and many a sleepless night I had to put up with. I was in bed most of the time while we were on Divisional Rest.

I am indeed sorry about our brother is having so much trouble with his eyes. He ought to see a specialist about them before he losses his sight. Julia told me about Jessie thinking of going to the hospital to nurse. It's a noble profession, but I'm glad she's not taking it up. It's a thankless job. Just like soldiering.

I have met quite a lot of Edmonton men since I came to France. We do such a lot of moving about, that we run across someone we know almost every day. I met Mr. Penny two weeks ago and spent a nice evening with him. You remember he used to live next to Williamses. He is Quartermaster now and holds down the rank of Captain. I've met Frank Walker of Fort Sask. several times and he always stops to shake hands, and do you remember Harry Higgins, brother of Marla (Minosa)? I met him in England. He was a sergeant in the 128th Batt. I don't know if he is over here yet or not. I met Tom Longboat in England too. I hear that he has been killed since. Dave McCullough is over here too. I see him every once in a while. It sometimes seems as if Edmonton had moved over here and left all the women folk behind, one meets so many from home. Every once in a while some one would come up to me and say "do you remember the time you chased me on your motor cylcle"? Many an hour we pass away talking of old times and wishing we were all back home again.

Well sis, in spite of the fact that we are used very decently by the French people, there's no use denying the fact that we are all aching and longing for our own beloved Canada. Of course there's work to be done yet and I spose will stay there till it is finished. A man has lots of time to think of his people and home out here, and one does get awfully lonesome at times. I know in my last trip to the front line, I dreamed of home and about "all the mothers, sisters and sweethearts" I ever had.

Of course we have lots of fun too. It isn't all hardships and loneliness out here. Most of the boys turn (Fatalists). I don't know if I've got it spelled right, after a few month fighting. They believe that everything is prearranged by Divine Power, and if it one's time to die no matter what one does, one has to die. Their motto is "If my turn comes next, I can't do anything to avoid it, so "I should worry". They don't worry either. Of course there are lots who suffer from shell shock or nervous breakdown, and they can't fight against fear, but most of the boys have a keen sense of humor, and laugh at almost anything. I know of one in particular, a corporal. He is the life and wit of our party. A shell landed close to him one night and the concussion threw him on his head several yards away. The shock stunned him for a minute and when he came to the first question he asked was "Is my head still on?" That sent the rest of us into a roar, and only a minute before they were all ready to beat it to the nearest dugout. It's the likes of him that make army life bearable, and the army is full of such as he. Then we have our sports & games, concerts and picture shows where one may forget his troubles awhile. But best of all for cheering a soldiers heart is a letter from "Home". There's always a scrambled when the mail is being given out. Yes, and there's hardly ever a vacant desk at the Y.M.C.A. writing room. Letter writing with us is sometimes very difficult. A soldier loses his pack and with it his writing material. Maybe his pack gets soaked with rain, spoiling his papers and the nearest Y.M.C.A is in the next town. He puts his writing off till a better time which does not turn up before he goes to the front line. A week or two slips by before he is able to write a letter.

I am laying on the ground trying to finish this letter before dark. I hope I do for I don't know when I'll have another opportunity. I wish mother understood English and could read. I can't think of anything that would interest her, and she always complains that we write such short letters. It's the people who read our letters to her who are to blame. Don't tell her that I was sick when you write, sis. It won't hurt her not to know.

I had a tough day the day before yesterday. I don't know whether it was the gas that sickened me or the berries that I ate. Some of the gas that "Fritz" is using now does not affect one till about 24 hours after. I was taken ill while on the march with vomiting, and later "sapoosowin" very severe. I wasn't able to hold down anything for two meals after. However I'm completely over it now, so there's nothing to worry about.

Well sis, I don't know what else to tell you so I better close now. I'm enclosing a picture taken just after my attack while we were out on rest. The French people at whose barn we were billeted, used me very nice. They used to feed me on fresh eggs. If I didn't have a girl in Canada, I'd have certainly have fallen in love with the oldest girl. She wasn't much on ‘looks', but she was a good girl, and a worker.

Give my love to Grannie when you see her. Love to the children.

Remember me to what few friends I've left. For yourself, good wishes, love and affection, from

Your brother

Alex.