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

**-Editor**

Edmonton, Mar 10, 1915

Dear Brother,

Received your two letters, also a letter from Jean this morning which I was glad to receive.

It is a little hard for me to write just now. I sprained my wrist playing hockey a week ago and I just took the bandage off. It is coming around all right now but a little weak just yet.

We have nothing but spring weather here now. It hardly freezes at nights. I suppose that fever is a little more contagious then the small pox was. I haven't seen Tom Wilson or Darcy since Christmas. I guess they are up the country. Say, isn't Clark's keeping store in Lakeside yet? What happened them? You were asking about Lewis Bros. I guess they would like to see out, their business is rotten for the expense they have.

Ray Connors and I were bathing on 24th street last fall, for three months. He was sick most of the time and we got him to go on the hospital just before Christmas. He was only in four weeks when he died. Doc Burrell and I used to go and see him every other day. We had to raise money for funeral expenses, you can imagine the time we had the way money is. His mother lives in Frisco. We hear from her quite often inquiring all about him. I don't suppose Capt. Ross will have any easy time in forming a company down there. Ontario had got a tough name out here for getting recruits. It is buzzing around here that we are leaving here next week for some pace but no body knows where. The Colonel got a message to be ready to leave on twenty four hours notice. It will be some other place in this country from what we can hear. We will be glad to have a change.

The 51st Battalion has moved in also. They are quartered in the cattle barns on the other side of the grounds. We are away ahead in the drills to what they are. There is rivalry between the two Colonels to get their men in shape first. We have a big lead. We hive thirty piece brass band, pipers band and bugle band, so you see we have lots of music and this sure helps when you are on a long march. I head we are due for a route march to the Fort on Friday. You know what that means.

We are fully equipped now, and the total weight is sixty pounds to carry about enough. Sunday is visitors day, about all the city move around giving us the once over, our bunks seems to attract them the most. We had a church parade last Sunday to the different churches. The YMCA has a building open to the Sunday services, and concerts through the week, a number of League Ladies put on a very nice play one evening. We also got a moving picture theatre on the grounds called Tipperary theatre.

Leo is canoassing for a Fhotographer now and doing a good business. I guess I will have my Foto taken, and mail you people some as soon as I get them. Red's address is Gen. Delivery Frisco.

Say have you got a Preacher and Doctor in town yet, and the same business men? Give Fagan my best regards. I suppose he still runs open house.

How is Bell Forbes getting along in her marrieds life? Any better than she did at the start. Where does Mrs. Forbes stay now? Is Percy home now? With all that available help you will be able to keep the snow shoveled which is a steady job in that country. I don't suppose the war has any affect on the chopping business. Have you got Blondie yet?

Remember me to Mrs. Kerr, and tell her to write me a line. I don't suppose Andre would get jealous. Barrish (Jim) got discharged being medically unfit. They are certainly doing some weeding out around here, new recruits coming in every day. We also have a doctors examination ever week so you can imagine how strict they are. Well, I think I don't pretty well for this time. Oh, Jean sent me a letter of Berts, which was quite newsy. She mentioned Jean Sutherland. What was she trying for.

We will know more about getting leave to home later, after our next move. I certainly would enjoy a few days around the old burg, but not to live there. I don't think.

Well, I got to write Jean, Jim, Tom and a few more and I would just as soon go to the guard house for a couple days.

I will enclose you some poetry, by a forty niner, and it is quite true.

Where is C. Murray having heard of him for some time. You had better answer this as soon as possible and the same address. Give me all the news especially all the scandal.

Love to All,

Bill

Belgium, Jan 30, 1916

Dear Brother,

Received your letter this afternoon after not hearing from you for a long time. I have written you two since the one in Oct. but I suppose you have received them before Nov.

We came out of the trenches yesterday, after being in for sixteen days - quite a stretch (as this is Sundays well we have to attend Church service and have a rifle inspection) It is the main thing in this country and your only friend and we certainly get jerked up if we don't have them in proper shape. It is awful to keep them clean in the trenches.

We have no brigaded the P.P.R.C.R. 42nd and the 49th. We took over the trenches the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and fourth. They went out for a months rest which was sure coming to them. We went in the front line for four days in the supports four, front line four, and then reserves four. Now we are out for seven days. Two Batts go in at a time. We relieved the R.C.R., and the O,.O. on our left relieved the 42nd.

We had the lest casualties of any I believe. You will see in the papers the 42nd had hard luck. They had thirty six casualties the four days in the front line. The first night we relieved the R.C.S. they had all their packs waiting for us to come in when they were shelled pretty heavy and had five killed and a dozen wounded - not a half an hour before we relieved them. Up to that they were lucky. We only had three killed, a few wounded which is good and lucky for six days. The trenches were only seventy five yards apart. We had the wind in our face all the time in, so wasn't looking for any gas attacks. I met Bob Nairn one night in the village. I was asking one of the P.P. transport man in he knew Bob, and he said why that is him standing beside me, but I wouldn't know him, so of course made myself acquainted. I guess I surprised him. He is looking good and fat. He has got a bomb proof job on the transports. I guess he never was in the trenches.

We will be in this country four months on the 9th Feb., then the Batt starts going on pass, so many out of a company each week. They allow you eight days in England. As you know we are all scrambling to be first. I suppose we will draw lots for our turn to go. It will certainly be a swell dish to have a few days amongst civilization and get a few square feeds and try to sleep in a bed, which I haven't been for four months. Hooky must have started to grow since I was home - sports that have joined there, well I can give them a tip not to get excited, and want to rush over here as they might be here soon enough. They want to stay they for as long as they can if they know when they are lucky. Old Doc went to the hospital out of the trenches with rheumatism. He was all crippled up proper with it. His shoulder went out before he might get to Eng. with it. I hear he will be lucky if he does. I received your Xmas box and cigars, also your Fatimas which you can renew as often as you like. I received a parcel from Jim on the 23rd, just before we came out of the trenches which he sent on the Nov. 1st nearly three months on the way. Lila sent me a large home made Fruit Cake. You can imagine how it tasted. I had a letter from Jean, written on the 6th the same news you did in yours. Well I guess this is all I got to say. Hoping you are all well. Answer soon and lots of news.

Love to All,

Bill

France, Mar. 9, 1916

Dear Brother,

Received your letter a few days ago and was glad to hear from you and so often.

We moved back into France yesterday for twenty one days rest, which consists of rifle, gas helmits, iron rations inspection, and shaves every morning followed by route marches in the afternoon of eight miles. You see there is no chance of getting stale, that is what they call a rest in this country. We did thirty more days in Belgium between the front line and the reserve trenches. As you have read in the papers of little action here, we had to reinforce other brigades. We had a few casualties but consider ourselves lucky. But so far I am fine and feeling good only for a cold, which a fellow gets living in damp dugouts, which sure gets a lot of them. We had all rainy weather up to the middle of Feb. Since then it has froze up and snowing, we have six inches of snow on the ground and still snowing. This is the last winter I was to put in here and I guess there are a lot like me.

They don't allow you to light a fire in the front line trenches, so you can imagine what it is like in there for four days, looking over the parapet all night on sentry go, and trying to grab and hours sleep in the day time. We are allowed a small fire in the reserves also to do a little cooking and it certainly gets a great play.

You have read about British retaken their lost trenches - well that bombardment has lasted a day and a night. It was just a continual roar. It was certainly a rare sight to see the shells bursting in the air after darkness, it just lit up like day all along the line. You know when the shells burst, there is a big flashy fire from it. There were hundreds of guns in action to you can imagine how Fritz trenches flattened and the barb wire. There is no use telling much more about it as it will be censored.

The passes started in our brigade. They just let a few go for a day, and then all of a sudden they were stopped. You know in account of expected more of Fritz. We all expect they will start again now since we are back here. I drawed number eight one in the company, so you see it will be a week or two before mine comes. The boys are back that got away before they were stopped, and to hear them tell of the time they had. Well you know the affect it has on us, but we have the misatisfaction ours is yet to come.

Had a letter from Doc the other day. He's still at base and the good time and the treatment he is getting, he wants to stay there. He has got rheumatism, about the worse case they have had. He has sure missed a lot of hardships since he went.

We are billeted in an old barn with half the roof off with some hob vines to sleep on, but we sure do sleep while we are at it. This is a great hop country here, every farmer grows them. You see just old men and women and girls on the farms here.

The aeroplanes on both sides have been very active when we were in, we witnessed some great scraps in the air. It certainly is exiting when they go after each other trying to ram each other and each firing machine guns. When Fritzs planes come over our trenches we get under cover, so as they can't find out our strength.

They dropped a lot of bombs behind our lines trying to find a battery, that are all well concealed, but did little damage. It seems to be a hard winter on the old people there. I hope you all are well, and have an early spring, and not catch the spring fever. Well as I have a number of letters to write now, as you don't feel liking writing in the trenches, I will have to get busy. You can tell Bert and Jim that this will do for them, also this time, but will write them later.

Hoping to hear from you soon. I will close.

Love to All,

Bill

France, May 23rd, 1916

Dear Brother

Received Your's and Mrs. Hill's letter from Buffalo, also the cigars which I am very thankful for. I also receives Mother's box the same day and every article came in useful. Extend my thanks to Mrs. McKay for the sugar. That luxury is certainly a souvenir in this country, it makes a person think of olden days. I suppose you and the Mrs. are settled down pretty well by this time, and happy in your new adventure.

We are having very nice weather here now to what we have been used to.

We go in the trenches tonight for eight days, this is our last time in this location. Each division has to put in three months here so our time is up when we come out this trip, and I guess we all will be shaking hands with ourselves when we are moving out. For this part of the line has not got a very good name amongst the troops that had been here.

We had pretty hard lucky the last time in which it was sixteens days. They bombarded us heavily for two hours just at sun down, after they thought they had killed us all our scared us out. They started coming over as soon as the shelling started. They were surprised to find us still on the job. Their officer and three others got in to our trenches but that was all, we checked their raid by rifle and machine gun fire. Our own camp had the honor of grabbing the prisoners. We gave the officer a pretty rough time of it, before our officer came around and took him away from us. He was wounded pretty bad in the legs, but will recover. He also was an Iron Cross man. He was taken down in front of our Colonel who asked him what he expected to find when he came over to our trench. Well he said he thought we would be all dead or deserted to the rear on such a bombardment. The colonel told him that he would find that his battalion was very much alive yet. He said he was awarded the Iron Cross for raiding trenches, and being so successful. Everyone rushed up to the front line even to the officer's cooks to reinforce us. The remainder of his men beat it back when we opened fire on them and a lot of them were counted for in No Man's Land. Our stretcher bearers were not in very good humor when they had to carry him out a long communication trench. Our casualties were pretty heavy from the shelling concussion. I see they are publishing the casualties in the paper there in a different away, and I guess it is just as well they do. This is one incident that happens about every time in.

We don't leave here till after dark and it is a long road to I guess I will close this for now. I will send you some post cards of the place we are at. Hoping you are all in the best of health and happy.

Love to All,

Bill

Ypre May 29, 1916.

Dear Brother,

Received your letter yesterday and was glad to hear so much news, especially from your Better Half. I see marriage life increased your rate of correspondence already.

I am taking a little more liberty in this letter as a friend of mine is going out tonight and leaving in the morning for his seven day leave - pretty tough luck, eh? He will post this in London so will not be censored.

So you will know where we are now - we came here to Ypre on the 24th of March and we are here for three months from that date. We relieved Imperial troops here then, we are in the extreme left of the Canadian Line. The famous guards regiments touches our left.

I am writing in this at the present time in the front line trench sixty yards from the Huns whose artillery is very active on our supports this afternoon. We are here for eight days and have got five of them in, and very fortunate for far slight casualties. We then move back to brigade reserves and do working parties at nights from there for eight days which makes sixteen days steady.

This is supposed to be our last trip in here, it is rumored we go to St. Omar for a month to recuperate, and then take over some line of trench there. We sure will be glad to get out of this hole. If there is such a thing as hell on earth this is it. They call the Ypre salient and the above is a rough sketch of how we are surrounded. The Canadians made this salient last summer in their advance and the trench fell back and it has been like it ever since. It has cost thousands of lives to hold it but Kitchener said it cost too many men for to fall back and make it straight now. You can understand how their artillery can ply of on from three sides at the same time, and they sure made use of it. The troop that we relieved would now know this part of the line now, there has been such improvement made on condition of the trenches. You know the Canadians are noted for keeping the trenches in good condition, also for the safety of the troops.

You have seen Santuary Wood mentioned in paper I suppose, we were in there as supports on our arrival here and they sure named it right. It used to be a heavy wood in peace time, but now the trees are stripped of their limbs and cut off by shells. When these large shells strike a tree its shrapenel and the explosion will chew it right off. The Huns don't spare shells to clean a round out from hiding batteries.

Ypre is the city I was aiming at in letters. When we are out in working parties we had to go through the city or what is left of it. There is a lot of transport traffic through it at night and Fritz certainly shells the roads to catch them, a transport job - is not quite so bomb proof up here. Our dug outs in the reserves were only half a mile from town so three of us got a permit one afternoon to go over and have a look around. We climbed all around the ruins of the Cathedral and the Cloth Hall. We were souvenir hunting but could not get any thing small enough. It has been ramsacked to often before us. There was certainly some great work in it. The walls are three foot thick. These Belgiums are very religious people and are great on images. I have got some post cards of the place and will send you some. There is a moat around the city also a very high wall and gates the same as used to be in England. There are troops billeted in the town now, they live in the cellars of the buildings knocked down now then when the cards were printed.

We were in Poperinghe on day for a bath and change of underwear. There are regular hot baths for the troops run by the Military Authority. We w went into a store to buy some tuck and while in there, a German aeroplane came over the town and dropped three bombs in the square. Well to our surprise in two minutes we owned the store. The occupants just dashed for the street and that was the last time we seen of them, they stop for nothing when any thing like that happens.

Last fall or when we came out here up to the time we came here we were holding the line at Kemmel Hill which you will see marked on your map. Well I guess this is all I can think of that is any importance to you. If I was talking to you I might be able to tell you a lot more, as kind of a side issue.

I received Ethol's wedding cake and Mother's pair of socks which I am very thankful for. I am beginning to imagine that I am getting old in hearing of so many of my old chums doubling up. I don't suppose it is compulsory in Canada yet.

Your Mrs. has got you beat already for local news and let it continue. When we go back to the country for a rest I expect my number will be due in that time. I think I will take my pass out for Ireland and have a look at old Dublin after the uprising.

I forgot to mention that one of our communication trenches runs parallel with the Ypre Canal. That St. Eloi's crap did not extend quite to us that night but were standing too, all the time it was going on expecting to be digging at any moment.

I suppose you are all settled down for a quite peaceful life now. I wouldn't care if I could say the same. But so far I am feeling good after my slight illness and feel lucky.

You can send this letter to Jim and it will save writing the same thing over again. I don't get an opportunity like this often.

Hoping you are all well and enjoying yourself.

Love to All,

Bill

432696 Private William Hill Lowrie participated in the charge on Sanctuary Wood at 7:00 A.M., the 3rd of June 1916. He was never seen again and is still missing to this day.

-Editor