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

**-Editor**

November 21st -15

Somewhere in Belgium

Dear Louise

This is Sunday night and most of the others are out on a work party. But I have a day off for a wonder. The other two fellows who are in the tent are both writing so I will do the same. We are much more comfortable in the tents. It is getting pretty cold now, not frosty like you are getting it there, but still cold all the same. We have an old pail with holes punched all over which we fill with coal or coke & it makes it cosy enough. Then we have had almost three days without any rain. I hav'nt heard from you for what seems like a long time, it takes so long to get a letter from Canada & if one happens to go astray (somewhere) it makes it bad. I got a card from you about Oct 18th a Jasper park scene. Did you get the card I sent a few days ago. They say it is pretty cold back there so I imagine you are having some swell time over there now. Lois must be getting to be a crack shot now, eh? Eddie had a letter from Mrs. Reed last week full of all most interesting news. Among other things she said that babies seem to grow on every bush out there. It is getting kind of cold in here as Eddie is outside swinging the pail of coke to make it burn. Oh this is a sweet life. Sunday night & the sound of artillery & machine guns, so different to the old sunday nights. My thoughts are wandering back home now, in fact they are seldom anywhere else. The fire has gone right out & Boone is using language which wouldn't hardly do for H. B. Sunday School. By-the-way do you still have a nice S.S. class. Its so long since I went to church that I almost forgot what its like. Indeed Louise I'm afraid I'm getting to be quite a tough & a heavy smoker. Now you won't write anymore after that. But to go back to the old subject, you would be just about in church now & pretty soon Nelson will come driving along with the rig (lucky kid). May and Lois must find it very lonesome now especially the latter. There doesn't seem to be much prospects of getting back for quite awhile, although we have the Germans beaten along this line. We get boxes here from England most of the time one or other of us in the tent & there is nine but one is in the hospital now so that leaves eight. Do you ever hear anything of Geo Crane. Remember me to all friends including "Bessie". I think this is all I know for now. If is not cheerful enough please excuse it and write soon to your sincere friend

George

December 18th, 1915

433084 A Coy Belgium

49th Batt Canadians December 18th-12-15

France

My Dear Louise

We are moving from here right away so I am finishing up my last green envelope. You see these green envelopes are given out to us very gingerly so we naturally prize them. They are the only ones that are not censored by our own officers. but they may be censored at the Base. Oh say wasn't that an awful blot on the last one I sent to you. I was addressing the envelope with a fountain pen I borrowed from another fellow. It must have looked awful when you got it & I was ashamed of it, but had no alternative owing to the shortage of these same envelopes. we don't know just where we are going but I don't think it will be very far from here.

We lost one of our boys out of this tent last night, he was shot through the leg. There were three of us working together on a machine gun emplacement. The bullets started coming over thick & fast till at last one hit Smithy Angus in the leg. We carried him out to the nearest dressing station but the doctor said it was not a dangerous wound, and he would not be away long. I hope he won't as we miss him. He has been with us all the time since we started out & in this life which is as one might say just for the present, one values a real friend.

This makes the second from our tent. I have just had a letter from the other boy, Arnett[?]. He is in England with a wounded foot "lucky kid". Angus used to sing in the Norwood Methodist (Mr. Smith's church). We have been pretty busy lately working on wire entanglements. We had orders last night to "stand to" as they expected an attack from the Germans which never came off. How sick we are of the whole affair. I often wish we could have one big battle & end it.

I often dream of home but the worst part of it is that one wakes up to the stern fact that it is only a dream.

I am anxiously looking for a letter but the mail comes very irregular now, its so near Christmas and its such a con[?] to handle it all. So when you write make them as long and nice as you can, won't you?

I am sending you another card hope you will like it. You see I can't write a decent letter so I have to put that in to help make up.

To use your own expression I think a lot which I can't put on paper (Comprez?) Well I will ring off now as there isn't much to tell so good-bye dearie

with love

from George

June 5th, 1916

Dear Mother Just a line to let you know that we are both allright for which we must thank God for we have been through a terrible ordeal. I don't know if I am allowed to say much about it but you will see by the papers what a fierce fight the Canadians have been into. How we Mart & I came through without a scratch I can not tell as we have had terrible losses. It has been simply awful I cannot describe it in words but I know there has been nothing worse in this war. We did our eight days in allright and were bombarded pretty heavy all the time but did not suffer much. Then we came out for a rest. The next night they broke through and we had to go back. We had to make a charge in broad daylight but they were ready for us and opened up an awful fire on us we took what cover we could get in old trenches and were there all day. They opened up again two or three times in the night but we kept them back. That night we were supposed to be relieved but the relief could not get in so we had another awful 24 hrs during which they sent over the terrible high explosives & shrapnel but we held firm. Two or three times they nearly landed one in our trench. The force of the explosion threw us down and I could'nt hear nothing but ringing in my ears. I was hit on the head about four times but my steel helmet saved me. Then I had a bullet go right through a mess tin strapped on my back. I am going to keep it as a souvenir. But I wasn't very frightened although the strongest nerves could'nt stand it for long while the shells are bursting around & above. We had to stay in that trench for 8 hours without water & no food but about two dry biscuits each. It was up to our shoe tops in water and we got all stiffened & cramped up. We were thankful when the relief came at last. Of course we had some very close shaves but God must have been watching over us and it made one think about that. The wounded were very brave and bore the pain and suffering like heroes, and some had ghastly wounds. I expect to be home soon now then I can give you a good account of it. We were so tired when we got home that we just fell down and slept for a long time. I will close now as I am pretty shaky to-day through nervous strain & loss of sleep etc. We havn't seen [?] but we are trying to find them now. They suffered heavy too. I think we are out for a good rest now. Good by with love George

August 27th, 1928

Apt. 32, 110 Columbia Ave.,

Palisades Park, New Jersey

Dear George:

You will never know how much I appreciated your letter of the 19th, just received, and I am going to answer right away; it was like a breath of "Old Times Sake", though in all truth, the old time to which you and I and a few others hark back as acquaintances in arms, is not a happy one. Yet, somehow I get a great "kick" out of some of the happenings and incidents, such, for instance, as the ones to which you referred.

But first of all, let me say that I was shocked to hear of the death of Eddie Boone. Gradually they drop off, our old side-kicks; those whom the war didn't take directly, takes them indirectly. It was he who tagged the name: "Muriel" on me; and how that did stick! Well, I am sorry. He farmed up close to you, did he not?

I am enclosing herein the slip of paper given me by the clerk in the BRITISH WAR GRAVES' COMMISSION OFFICE in Ypres, and from which I found both the graves of Mart and Bill. The notation encircled has no reference to the graves, but is merely a notation that I made at the time, endeavoring to locate Bellevue Spur where you'll remember we caught hell in the year of grace, 1918, - on Passchendaele. Also, while looking through my old trunk for this slip, which I knew I had, I ran across an old copy of MACLEAN'S, which I am sending you under separate cover and which might interest you; it describes briefly my reactions, and I believe what would be yours or any other hard-boiled "old-timer's" reaction when returning to the scene of that slaughter.

You will remember after the June 3rd scrap, I was corralled for the Orderly room because of Sergeant Sharpe (the Orderly Room Sergeant) having been wounded. Well, if I remember rightly, Mart was killed the next trip into that hell-hole, which would be about the 18th of June, 1916, at a point, judging from where his body was found some 500 feet east of Maple Copse. I remember when his personal effects were taken from his body, we found a note - a note which left so deep an impression on me that I have never forgotten it and never will, for I consider it one of the sublimest acts of heroism of which I have ever heard, of which one seldom hears except in the pages of romantic fiction. The words were, written after he was wounded and in the brief period before he died:

On the Battlefields of Flanders,

Good bye Mother, good bye all.

Mart.

George, I am deeply interested in knowing whether or not your mother ever received that note. I was handed in to the Orderly Room and carefully labelled with the rest of his effects, after having been drawn to the attention of Colonel Griesbach, because of the high beauty of his last thought and act. What an act of sublime courage! I often think of it; it is one of the things that stands out in my memory as the most heroic of all that which came to my notice in that frightful massacre.

Well, George, it you ever go to France, and no doubt you will, you will find no trouble in locating their graves. I saw any number of our old comrades' graves - Russel Burger; he lies down in that lousy mud flat by Maple Copse. Baldwin, the sheep herder, lies in Sanctuary Wood cemetery. Bamber is there too; you remember that little red-haired kids who was ninety-nine percent guts and one-percent common sense; well, the poppies are sucking the juice out of the ground over him, right below the crest of Observatory Ridge, a stone's throw from all the rest. There are any number of others. What a layout! It'll give you the greatest thrill of your life to walk over that acre of hell. Then there is the large and main cemetery, China Wall Cemetery.

And do I remember that night you and I walked out after the Third day of June battle, and the C.M.R.? You bet I do. And how the Jerries did throw tear gas! but we found the Y.M.C.A. dugout and got the only thing, so far at least as I am concerned, we ever got from them gratis. Then up through Menin gate. do you remember "Hell's Fire Corner?" Then passed the Cloth Hall, down passed the Asylum - then out, OUT, O U T! Well, I'll see my country in hell before I'll do it again. That is, if the circumstances are as they were before. They don't fool me anymore, these capitalist blatherskites and mummywigs. Every boy that fell, fell an innocent victim to the junkerism of these bunksters, both our own and the Germans. Look what these nervous Nellies down here are doing right now, in Nicaragua. Of course, it's on a small scale, but the principle is the same.

Well, George, those were the great old days, just the dame. We were kids then. We are not so very ancient yet, of course, but too darn ancient to crawl around on our bellies, wet, cold, hungry, in no man's land looking for trouble, dragging a few mill bombs back of us and a .303 Lee-enfield that might as well have remained behind for all the use it was. And a shovel. Do you remember Sam Hughes' shovel. I shed few tears when I heard that that old bird was dead. I am waiting to celebrate the death of Borden; I haven't forgotten how that bag of bunk kept us waiting, on a trip out of the line while at Brule, for several hours so that he could give us the once over - when he arrived, while we should all have been up enjoying ourselves at Bethune, up at Fatty's.

I met only one native that we knew when we were there, and that was petite little Germaine du Hamel, at St. Hilaire. She married that one armed frog eater and now lives in Bethune. She happened to be home visiting; and don't think that she didn't give me a royal welcome. I do not know that you remember her, as she was at "A" Company's headquarters. Well, we downed the vintage and talked over old times, as best we could.

I know little of the Fortyninth. My physog was in the papers during the time of the Edmonton Coal Miner's strike as second in command to "General Ryan" in picketing the coal mines around Edmonton, during the winter of 1922 and 1923 and trying to force the coal barons around there to either close down their mines or pay a living wage to their slaves, and Jack Bewsher saw it. So I had a letter from him, addressed to the Miners' headquarters in Calgary. He was digging coal out at Drumheller and reported being married again and was getting his "rations" regularly yet. So evidently he was getting along all right. Once, while sitting in the White Lunch in Calgary, about eleven o'clock, in came a fellow who looked as if he was getting into old Burt Clibbery's mess line - Coggy, our old friend Cogswell. Well, needless to say, he came home with me and we talked for three days steadily, renewing old times. I lived at Ed's place then. Coggy was a great old boy. Old Sam Campbell, and old Bob Aspinall - I don't know where they are. Sergeant Carter, I believe, is dead, and my best wish for him, and I say that in all sincerity and appreciation, is that he had a good big glass of beer by his side when he died, for he'd then die happy. Burt Clibbery, of course, died before the battalion left England. I used to see Jim Butterfield occasionally down in Calgary; he has a silver plate in his head and quite a dent. But with all that, he still seemed to be able to land a soft job. He was, and might still be, an Alberta Government Sanitary health officer. He told me once, when I met him in Calgary, that the greatest pleasure he ever had was a month or so before when he told Sergeant Francis that he'd have him arrested if he didn't clean something or other up. I forget exactly the circumstances, or how it came about that he could have him arrested. However that was how it stood. They were not the warmest of friends, evidently; no doubt Sgt. Francis (M.O.'s flunkey) had once upon a time put Jim to work after a #9. Kind of funny situation, at times, wasn't it. E.O. tells me tht Sgt. Francis is also dead. I saw Francis at the Windsor hotel when I was there in 1923, during the coal miner's strike. He was married.

E.O. quite often gets to Edmonton; he is in the Railway Mail Service, and though he usually goes to McLeod, he does occasionally go North. Not so long ago he met ? (for the life of me, I can't remember his name just now, but the little fellow who continually smoked cigarettes and coughed,) Well, he still smokes cigarettes and coughs; they haven't killed him yet. I believe he is a floor walker in the Hudson Bay.

Now, for myself, George, congratulations for having married the "best American Girl in the world." But I can't believe that she is the best, for I thought I had her. Certainly she is the best one that I have met yet; but then, I haven't had the pleasure of meeting your wife, though I hope to some day. Just as I hope to meet you and have you and your wife as our guest should it ever chance that you make the trip to the old country and France, via New York. And congratulations on having two little girls and a possible third one. You have me beat all to pieces, for I haven't any at all. And we have been married almost six months, so that's pretty slow for a fortyniner, you know; nor can I report any on the way. Well, to tell the truth, George, and speaking as buddy to buddy, I hope to raise a couple of red hot Bolshevists some day, two real honest-to-God constructive revolutionaries, but not for a few years yet, for it it the ambition of my wife and I to in four years from now, buy an Auxillary cruiser and in that tour the world. Can you imagine us floating around on the broad Atlantic in a thirty-five foot dory, sail boat, propelled by an auxillary engine in calm weather. Our ambition in life is writing, story, novel and travel writing; that requires a great deal of work, application, study and a variety of experiences. I have done some writing, but it is a hard game to break into. However, we hope that after four years we can devote our full time to it. I met my wife on an ocean steamer, on the last trip that I made around the world. She, too was on a tour, and our interests are pretty much alike in that we both have ambitions to write.

Ed has been in Calgary since his return from the front. He married my, and incidently his own too, childhood sweetheart; that is, he put one over on me, as he always did, and married my girl. Well, they have been married now almost nine years and still lays claim to an undying devotion, so things have not gone badly with them. They have two children, a boy and a girl. Cogswell, by the way, is also married and has a small family, one then/and he had only been married a year. That is four years ago, so I suppose he has five now. You know, Coggy was a fast worker. I met our friend Reg. Peach several times in Calgary. Was at his home on several occasions; his is a carpenter contractor. He built a garage for me in 1921 and it blew down the following week when a chinook chanced along. I didn't sue him for damages; nobody would sue a man who drove a such Ford as he did. But Reg. was a mighty good fellow anyway, if he weren't much of a carpenter. H built a house - or barn - for my brotherinlaw, and the first wind storm that came along strewed the shingles all over the prairies. But he was a good soldier anyway. And do you remember Sergeant Pinckney - he was an "A" Company Sergeant after you were on H.Q. Company, but you might know him anyway. Well, he is married and has a charming wife - a school teacher. I met him in Bellevue where his father has a general store, once I was down there during a coal miner's strike. He had a little war of his own after he came back It seems that he had something to do with the G.W.V.A. and pension fund. Well, there was a widow - a war widow - who used to draw a monthly stipend and it was Pinckney's duty to hand her the check. This widow, it seems, was engaged to a dago coal miner who packed two six shooters. Well, one day Mr. Coal Miner came home a little earlier than usual and had just time to empty one six shooter at Pinckney hopping through the bed room window, dragging a pair of pants after him. It caused quite a sensation at the time, and Pinckney lost all ambition for anything but a quiet, married life. This is not gossip, but general knowledge, but mighty funny, if you can see the humor of it.

The last time I saw Carol, (you remember, the kid, Shirley Carol) who gave us all so much grief, he was walking up the street in Calgary advertising some kind of a movie show. He was dressed in a swallow-tailed coat, high hat, monocle, a long cane and a tag on his back. He was surely the dude, alright, and I hardly knew him. Well, I had quite a talk with him and he had plenty of time to talk, and imagine my surprise when he started in: "Well Andy," he said, "I've found Jesus." I hardly knew what he was talking about for I was dumfounded for the moment, but listened respectfully while he went off on a diatribe about his religious experiences. It appears that he had been converted a week or so before and he told me all about it. He left, promising to pray for me, for which I thanked him. Well, poor Carol, he didn't fit himself well into civilian life. You know, he was pretty badly wounded shortly before the end of the war, and evidently hadn't had a very good deal from the Government in the matter of pension. He was in hospital for several years. Then when he got out he spent what little money he had studying the violin; when that was exhausted he tried everywhere for a job in an orchestra, but with very indifferent success. His grandparents, with whom he lived before the war, had died during the war, so when he returned he came back to no one. Then, too, while in the Sanitarium in the Crow's Nest Pass, immediately after the war, it appears that he fell in love with quite an elderly nurse, who, when he told her of his undying devotion, just laughed at him. Carol took it so seriously that he swallowed the first bottle of iodine that he could get hold of, and I guess they had all they could do to save his life. Anyway, I have heard or seen nothing of him since, and can wish him nothing but the best. Strangely enough, though he seemed only a kid then, though no doubt about our own ages, he has aged a lot, much more than he should have for after all, he is but thirty years of age yet.

Now George, I have told you everything that I can and sent you the Magazine and the other information. If you ever find the time, I'll be glad of a note from you for old time sake.

And my wife joins me in wishing you and your family the very best in life, for you deserve nothing less.

Very sincerely, your old sidekicker

[signed]

I.W. (Anderson)