**Preface: This transcript was sourced from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment Military Museum. Accession No. 1987.73.1. [ ] are notes added later by Snyder**’**s sister, Stella**

**-Editor**

Exhibition Camp Toronto

Pte. J.L. Snyder 436720 – D

194th Batt.

Oct 16(?) 1916

Dear Stella and Will,

I’m just going to scribble a couple of lines to let you know we are hung up in Toronto with no further orders to go either to Halifax or Overseas.

We had a good time coming down except that at Munston Alta at the Edmonton and Eastern junction some pro-German threw the switch and sent the last half of the train nearly 8 coaches up the Edmonton track and we finished up with three cars in the ditch and no one hurt as we were only traveling about five miles an hour. We left Calgary on Tuesday night and got here Sunday 12 p.m. and detrained on Monday morning.

I heard I had another nephew to add to the number so they are beginning to grow pretty fast. Wait till I get started and we’ll show you all up for speed and weight and fine points in every way. I saw a piece in the paper that said there were two kinds of children your own dear little darlings and the noisy \_\_\_\_\_ of other folks. You just wait till we get started and see if they aint better looking than anyone else’s kids whether they are or not.

I never saw such a town for girls in all my life as Toronto. We had a route march today and passed two or three more as far as that goes. Factories I mean not girls. This sounds a bit mixed up but I guess you can dig out the facts I am striving to relate to you. (How’s that). There were girls on the street and girls in the factories and girls in the colleges and houses and schools in fact there were three girls to every man and they sure took a notion to those dinky little glengarry caps of ours. You never saw me in a glengarry did you? I sure am cute little son-of-a-gun in one of them things on the side of my nut.

Well I guess this is about all the B.S. I can sling in one letter so I guess I’d better quit. Write soon and address to:

D. Coy. 194th Battalion

Army P.O.

London, Eng.

Lovingly

Jack.

#436720 Pte. J.L. Snyder 49th Canadian Battn. B.E.F. Army P.O. London, Eng.

Saturday, Dec. 30th/16

Dear Stella and Will and Evelyn and somebody else whatever his or her name happens to be,

Once you wouldn’t believe I was going to enlist and once I thought I’d never get to the front but as sure as the Lord made little apples here I am “Somewhere in France” I can’t say where because the censor might hear me telling you and then my letter would go overboard. Anyhow we are here at the base of course you don’t know where that is but I do so that’s enough anyhow it is most hellishly muddy and we are in tents too. The grub is fair and there’s lots of it and a pretty good prospect of becoming fertilizer for the future French farmers in a few weeks so “why worry”. We will probably be sticking Fritz on the end of a bayonet up to our knees in mud inside the next month so a week or so after you get this please feel a little sorry for yours truly because it’s a cinch nobody out here will.

I’ve only got about forty letters to write so don’t be surprised if this is some short.

We are going to stay here for a few weeks training before we go up the line and if we can stand being gassed and bayonetted and caught on wires and everything devilish they have fixed up here, then we are allowed to go up the line and try, see how long we can dodge bullets and old nails and bolts and things they sling at the poor soldier.

Well I’ve got to saw off and start slinging B.S. to someone else.

Write soon or sooner.

Yours, Jack.

P.S. Let Flora have some of this news because I don’t know her address.

Jack.

49th Battn. Canadians B.E.F.

Army P.O.

London, Eng.

Saturday Jan 13/17

Dear Stella and Will,

Well I’m still here up to the eyes in mud but expect to pull my freight for parts unknown very shortly.

We are having a fairly good tome in spite of the rain (don’t tell Lowell Bach). We march about three miles in the mud part of the way and if it happens to rain or snow very hard we go to a tent and have a lecture. If not we each get a sack of straw and pretend to ourselves it’s a German and fix bayonets and charge and stick him right savagely where his gizzard out to be. At least we try to but sad to relate sometimes we miss it altogether and once on a rainy day I was yelling like someone fresh from Ponoka (Alberta’s Insane asylum) and just before I reached my German sack the ground or rather mud must have moved forward, anyhow I sat down in the ground and kicked my special Fritz instead of bayoneting him in a civilized fashion.

Well I guess that is plenty of this stuff. Taking it all around we have a fairly good time and a pretty good bunch of instructors.

There’s nothing to tell about particularly here but after we get home again I guess we can tell some yarns. You can start following the casualties as soon as you get this letter and if you see Pte. J.L. Snyder 436720 has been wounded or worse then you’ll know I’ve got a good bed for a while anyhow and that will be something.

Say if you ever feel real generous just send a fellow a couple pks. of Players Cigarettes and some Old Chum and I’ll remember you in my will if I have time to change it after the parcel arrives.

Well I guess this is all for now. Write once a week whether I do or not because sometimes I may not have much time. Tell Hazel and Harvey and what’s his name you got a letter from Uncle Jack and give my love to everybody in sight. Give May Mathie a kiss for me (Don’t tell Evelyn). Do anything else to think I’d be fool enough to do for myself.

Well bye-bye for now

As ever Jack

France Mar 8/17

Dear Stella and Will,

I got your letter quite a few days ago but haven’t had much time to answer. We just moved down to the Battn. and from now henceforth address your letters to

No. 12 Platoon, C. Coy. 49th Bn. Canadians B.E.F., France.

You say you like to get letters from me but not more so than I like getting yours. There’s something about your letters I don’t know what that makes me like to get them so much I guess it’s just because you and I have sort of been pals the last few years.

Bert is still in England and the last I heard from him he had a bomb proof orderly room job.

No mud here today either frozen solid and snowing like it used to do at home. Big flakes and so many of them that you can hardly see a hundred yards.

Hell, you say you don’t think I’m any wiser than I was before maybe not in the way you mean but we sure are getting some wisdom and experience over here. If anyone had told me three years ago that at this time I’d be living with a French family in the north of France I sure would have called them names. We have a \_\_\_\_\_ old Landlady. She makes us all a cup of coffee every night and morning and every noon before we go out.

I have two pictures of the kids now but I can’t send that one back because they don’t make envelopes here that fit pictures except the Y.M.C.A and we are a long way from it. I’d just as leave keep it anyhow and then when I get back I can give it to you.

We are all going to be back in Sept. you see at the latest so we will just be in time to take off the harvest. All they boys say we will so here’s hoping.

I saw Castle Madge for a few days before we came up here. That is I met him about three days before we left and saw him a couple of times since. Then I saw Gordon and Gittridge, you remember him last Xmas at home. I ran across them just the night before we left.

We marched 14 miles with a full kit. That is every damn thing we own and a blanket in the bargain. Left camp at 730 a.m. and got here about 4:00 p.m. with an hour out for dinner. And believe you me I sure was just about all in. I felt like laying down somewhere and staying there for the duration of the war and a day after. Well I guess I’ll quit before I start another page. Write lots and I’ll do the same.

Lovingly Jack.

France, March 26/17

Dear Stella and Will –

Excuse the scribble because my pencil is only 1/8 of an inch long more or less and it’s colder than h---- in this hut this morning. We left our happy home in the billets and came down to these huts the other day and its quite some cold.

I got your letter yesterday and was glad to get it too. I’m beginning to look forward to Canadian mail day to get your weekly letters because they’re always there regularly.

No, nothing interesting going on here yet but we expect to go up pretty soon. It’s just a rumor so far but I guess it won’t be long now before we move.

Evelyn has only gone to Calgary for a visit and I guess she’ll be back again by the time you get this. I know she intends to see about getting some breaking done on our place this summer so I guess she’ll be back soon.

Gee, I wish I could get back to your place for supper once. When you said about May and Jim Mathie being there for supper it made me think of good hot tea and warmed over spuds and the rest of the good things you always seemed to have for supper.

You tell Jim Mathie that since he’s only 17 for him to stay home and finish his high school and college. There’s plenty of single fellows over home that are plenty old enough to come over without taking those under 18.

Well we are having a fairly good time just now only its rather cold and wet but Parton and I are company runners and we don’t go out on work parties unless Mr. Malone (the second in command of D Coy.) goes out and wherever he goes, we go with him around here. Of course up the line we’ll be pretty busy I guess taking messages to Battn. Headquarters and to each Platoon. It was on that job that Dad Stevens got wounded and won the D.C.M. so, I might come home with a V.C. yet (I don’t think).

Well it’s too darn cold to write any more now so I guess I’ll have to quit.

Write soon and lots.

Lovingly,

Jack

March 27/17

Hello Stella

Just got another letter from you last night so I’ve some more to write.

I don’t know where my letters have been going because I don’t remember ever having missed more than two weeks without writing at the longest. I didn’t get your parcel yet but they always take a little longer than letters so I guess it will be here shortly.

No I don’t know who belongs to Betty’s ring in the 194th, I only know one who knows her and I don’t think it’s him.

Sorry I called Master Orval (?), what’s his name but I assure you it will never happen again.

I met Tommy Irvin last night. He is in the 7th Canadians and I was over there looking for Guttridge when I saw him. I told him I was hearing from you every week regularly and he said to remember him to you and to tell you that he would live in hopes of doing the light fantastical with you again soon.

I haven’t seen Jim yet I don’t know what Battn. he transferred to so don’t know where to look for him. I tried to locate Herbie and Jack Miller too but Jack is a Machine Gun Sargent in England yet and I don’t know where Herb is. Tell Mrs. Wood to cheer up, the war will soon be over. But if Bert Wood don’t get over here soon he may not see any of the fun.

Well there is nothing more to tell about here and I guess Edmonton is just the same as it used to be.

Tell Will thanks for the parcel and for the ones Will promised were to come. They’ll get here sometime although they take a long time to come through.

Bye-Bye for now. Love to all from,

Jack.

France, April 9th [1917]

Dear Stella and Will, -

I sent a letter a few days ago and then received a parcel after I had handed the letter in so I just added on the fact the the parcel had arrived and handed the letter back again for posting.

The parcel was every bit as welcome as before and the candy was extra good.

I got a long letter from you last night so that explains why I’m writing so soon again.

I’m glad to hear that Tommy Irwin is back in Edmonton because I was told he was killed last August. Still I’ve been reported killed so often now that I should be used to hearing of other people getting treated the same way. You should have seen the look on Schroeters face when I walked up to him in London and called him Clem. You’d think he was looking at a ghost instead of a love man. He fully believed I had been rubbed out last June and naturally was taken by surprise to see me walk up and say “Hello Clem”.

Yes I admit I haven’t written very often but Lord! There are times when I have a helluva job to scare up enough to write more than about three or four lines.

You should see me out here these days and you’d sure stare some. Hiking down a trench dressed in a muddy uniform a tin hat, rubber boots and wearing a gas helmet and a man-sized .45 automatic revolver slung somewhere down near my hip. We sure are a tough looking bunch of runners and after a real muddy trip its hard to tell just what is coming down the trench, a man or a chunk of mud with a tin Lizzie on.

Still we manage to live through it and sometimes it’s exciting enough to be interesting and at other times a darn sight to exciting to be pleasant.

For instance the other other night when I went out with an officer and it was as black as the ace of spades out. We were going somewhere overland and of course the natural result was that we got lost and wandered around no-mans land till one of the men challenged us and we found out where we were at. Of course this very seldom happens, in fact it was my first experience and I sure ain’t hungry for any more.

Well bye-bye for now. I’ll write again soon if possible.

Your loving brother,

Jack

France, April 16 [1917]

Dear Stella and Will, -

Just got your letter last night and the parcel of candy today for both of which I was truly thankful. I can look forward to your letters regularly now and your parcels too thank the Lord since nobody else seems to think that us fellows out here ever like a taste of homemade candy and such like stuff.

The way I tied into that walnut fudge (dops?) wasn’t slow believe me and also thanks very much for the powder, its just what I wanted and Sabadilly(?) is the best in the land and can’t be bought out here or in England either.

Well I’ve been in the trenches already but you’ve not much to stew about as far as my first trip went because it was very tame compared to what the other Battn’s went thro’. Of course I heard of few machine gun bullets and one or two snipers but my head was very careful to keep low. Then of course I imagined every shell I head coming was going to land beside me but I soon realized than none of them were and that when a fellows heard a machine gun open up all he had to do was keep low and hear the bullets coming nearer and nearer and then over your head and away again as the gun swept the parapet from side to side.

As far as shells went there were very few and mostly whizz bangs (18 pounders) and burst in the air and before many came near I was down in Hdqrs. dugout safe and sound.

That’s about all there is to being in the trenches together with mud, oceans of it, all kinds of it, all kinds soft sticky mud and watery soupy mud, black mud and brown mud. We were only in 24 hrs. just a good christening for a beginner. I don’t know when we go in again and don’t care an awful lot how long we stay out. Now for your letter.

Both parcels arrived safe so I guess its all right now. I didn’t like to holler for help in the way of parcels but everyone seemed to think that as long as I got my army rations I was all right so I just decided to start something, so far you’re the only one who has commenced since I wrote.

Well as far as the noise goes in the trench it was very quiet when I was there so you’ll have to wait till I come out next time for news as to that.

That was some joke alright and it got a laugh from the boys tho’ of course I didn’t tell them where I heard it.

So Flora is going to build a granary for the fall eh! Well good luck to her and here’s hoping she don’t get stung too bad. That’s one thing I’m hoping to get out of this mess safe for just to see how disappointed they’ll be when I take the oxen away after them counting on me getting Napoo’d (?) as they say here. When you ask about such a fellow who has been killed that’s the answer, Na-pas. It’s French for gone or finished. We pick up a few French words here once in a while. They come in handy when we are billeted in some French burg and can’t compre their lingo very well.

There’s one thing that would interest you here and that the looks of the old front line. In between the lines are great big craters from mines that have been sprung, big enough to put the Caledonians back into and back of that the land is just one mass of shell holes made by the artillery barrage put up in front as the boys went over. For hundreds of yards there not an inch that hasn’t been hit and most of it has been turned over more than once. It was a great sight and one that a fellow will never forget. There were other things on the same ground that I’ll never forget either but the less said about the rest, the better. I’ll tell it all when I get home or most of it anyway.

Then there were lots of souvenirs but since we were not in the big advance proper we didn’t have much show as nearly all the dugouts had been pretty well combed out.

There’s been quite a few 194 boys gone out with minor wounds but none of them serious and none killed so far.

Well I guess this all for now. Thanks again for the parcels and the weekly letter, you’ll be able to realize how much they are appreciated when I can get home and tell you all about it.

Say hello to Will for me and tell Mrs. Woods the war will soon be over so she’ll be alright.

Lovingly Jack.

France, May 2nd/17

Dear Stella and Will, -

I got your two letters while I was up the line so I’m taking the first change I have to write back.

I heard from Flora and Katie too so I know about them taking turns sending parcels. As far as I know there is five on the way now but they didn’t come in the last Canadian Mail so I guess I can expect a couple in the next.

Some class to you having gold on your mouth but you haven’t got much on me. I had a piece of steel come through my tunic and another knock the skin off my jaw so if you’ve got gold in your face I’ve a first class change to get steel in mine.

So there was nothing exciting happened eh! at the 500 game? Do you remember in my last letter I said there wasn’t anything happening up the line when I was there and not enough shells to make it interesting. Well I got my fill up there last trip. We were in a rather conspicuous place and the Germans just took delight in hammering away at that place night and day especially along towards morning when I used to make a trip to Battn. Headquarters. The time I got the shrapnel thro’ my tunic was in daylight and two of the fellows had gone into a dugout ahead of me and I was coming along behind about 20 ft. away when I heard this whizz-bang coming. I made a dash for the dugout door but the shell beat me to it and burst in the bank about 15 ft. from me. When I got inside I didn’t know whether I was hit or not and when the other runner saw the hole in my tunic he started looking for trouble but I missed it all pretty well. It was a high explosive shell and only 15 ft. away and how it happen that I wasn’t blown off my feet nobody knows but shells are queer things and liable to do anything. My ears were ringing for hours after.

If George Noble is in the Battn. you said then he’s in the line at present but I’ll try and get over to see him as soon as they come out. I ran across Fred Poole yesterday, he’s in the PPCLI’s and just ran into him in town here last night. I didn’t even know he was in France let alone being in the same brigade. No we don’t always live in dugouts. Back here we don’t but while we are up the line we always do as far as possible.

We are having a bunch of fine weather these days, hot sun, green grass, trees just coming in bud and everything looking good. The only trouble is that its awful hot marching.

Well I guess this is all for now. I’ll write again soon.

Lovingly Jack

France, May 21st/17

Dear Stella and Will –

Sorry I couldn’t keep up my weekly letter system but circumstances intervened so therefore I made use of that famous soldiers friend The Field Post Card, commonly known in these quarters as a Whiz-Bang. It’s a lovely card and very very useful in keeping up with one’s correspondence. A fellow can say he’s quite well and will write soon etc. and that’s all you can say in a letter.

Well I’ve had a good trip this time absolutely nothing doing in the way of shells or any other uncomfortable thing that is (Made in German). Well there was a few big shells but they didn’t come near anyone but me that day and when I found they were bursting too close to be comfortable I made tracks for the nearest dugout and stayed there till his little nasty spell was over.

That was the only time there was anything interesting and as long as a fellow kept his head low he was pretty safe from sniping.

A bullet is an interesting think to listen to. When they are flying high they sound like the “weet weet” that a partridge makes and when they are near like a bee that in a devil of a hurry to get somewhere.

Oh well I guess that’s plenty for this time. I’ve got lots more to write yet tonight.

Remember me to everyone in town that I know and tell them I’m still alive and kicking specially kicking.

Lovingly

Jack

P.S. Forgot about your birthday being last 16th was too exceedingly busy that day to write. 24 aren’t you. Gee we’re getting old. I’ll be 22 this year.

So long.

J.

France, June 5th/17

Dear Stella and Will,

Don’t get sore if this letter is short and maybe not even sweet. I haven’t had a line from you for five weeks and had only two short letters from Evelyn in the last three weeks. I think there must be a hoodoo on my mail. I had one letter from Gertie, one from Hilliard and three from Evelyn in the last five weeks and last night the Canadian mail came in so that means no more letters for another two or three weeks. Good night. I’m getting tired of waiting and waiting for mail day and then not getting any letters. Don’t be surprised if you don’t get my mail regularly because I can’t very well write when I’m up the line only a bunch of whiz bangs and they don’t give much news.

Well everything is the same as usual around here. Abso-bally-lutely quiet and nothing doing anywhere. Always broke(?) always kicking, motor lorries are still driving around and aeroplanes are still flying and the war hasn’t quit. I am quite well and haven’t heard from you for a long time as it saves(?) on the whiz-bangs.

I suppose Edmonton is as dead as ever and things are just as they were when I left. The Packing Plant car still runs up Namayo and the Highlands car down Jasper so why should I kick about not having letters when theres nothing to write about.

Now don’t think for a minute that I’m bawling you out but I feeling rather rotten tonight. I’m not sore because I know you’ve written every week as promised.

Never mind Stella, old kid, you’re the best sister that ever happened and you deserve a better letter than this but I’ll try and do better next time.

Just remember you’re second in my mind and it’s not your fault you’re not first. Just don’t take any notice of all the crazy stuff I write and remember I’ll always be,

Your Loving Bro,

Jack.

Trenches, France

June 10th/17

Dear Stella and the rest, -

Got two letters from you last night which were exceedingly welcome as you may be sure.

You say you got my letter written April 16th nearly a month on the way. Well I got yours of the 12th May last night and if a lot can happen in a month a darn sight more can happen in two months. There’s been quite a few happenings in the last couple of months, believe me. Especially this trip up the line several things have happened but I have neither time nor space to describe the delights of modern warfare and that lovely little stunt commonly known as going over the top.

Well about your letters. Verily, I was a week without a letter, indeed I was four times one week or to be exact 28 days with no word but I’ve had four letters in the last two days so we are all squared up again.

So they said I had been killed in action on the 9th of April eh! Well I’m still alive and kicking yet at any rate. Stories like that often get loose but if anything ever happens to me, Evelyn will certainly write and let you know and you’ll hear about it before the casualty lists come out. So Mrs. Wood is quite happy with her little tin hero. But seven or eight times a week, have a heart. I’m beginning to think that a certain young soldier that used to take her out to the Highlands when her hubby was on guard, must have been somewhat slow. I guess all her goody-goody stuff was a bluff and the said soldier swallowed it all so deep that he never tho’t of calling the same little bluff. Maybe he ain’t wishing he could go thru’ it all again.

Don’t worry if my letters don’t come regularly. There’s times when I can’t get a letter written for over a week and by missing one mail that would make them late.

Any time you get your picture taken I want one and if you don’t send me one, why, there’ll be a war on, A La U.S. with letters.

Evelyn’s address is 4708 McLeod Trail, Calgary.

Tell Hazel thanks for her letter, glad to hear she has a new dress and is quite well and was up the the Pan. the other night. That’s what she said wasn’t it.

Gee you’re getting some old aren’t you. Twenty-four. There was a time when 24 seemed an awful long way off.

Its very seldom we hear of the Canadian casualties only in our own battn. or someone we ask about. Mrs. Hood seems to have gone to the devil entirely. I hope she don’t blame me for it. I’m very sorry but can’t cry.

So Hilliard and Dad me the big break at last eh! I tho’t they would soon. What was it all about and how did it start? I always said that when he got a little older there would be lively times around the old shack.

Wish I had a few hundred bushels of spuds stored away in a hollow tree somewhere.

Well this is all for this time, I’m sure if you’re not tired wading thro it the censor will be anyhow.

Love to all from

Jack

France, June 16th/17

Dear Stella and Will,

I guess it’s time for another letter to you tho’ I haven’t one to answer. Your letters come in bunches of two or three just according to how often the mail comes over here.

I wrote you a letter from up the line with a promise to write some more when I got back here. Well since I am back therefore I’m writing. Had a little show last trip in. We went over the top, in the dead of night when everything was quiet or I should say, everything was quiet up to the time we went over. Then all of a sudden the barrage opened up and over went the first wave. Now a barrage isn’t much to you folks and its alright here when you say it quick. But when that noise commence it would make your hair stand on end. It was mostly whizz-bangs and they travel pretty nearly in a straight line so when they began to come over it sounded like they were just skimming our parapet. There weren’t dozens of them but hundreds. They sounded something like a whip singing thro’ the air and with a bang at the end of it. Some, that landed farther back, made more of a whiz-z-z – “bang”? but the ones that landed in front of us just came with a little angry Z-Zip clang. Pretty poor way to describe it but I’ll tell you better when I see you. Then there was so darn much noise you couldn’t hear yourself think anyhow.

You see as soon as the barrage opens the boys go over and as soon as it lifts to Fritz’s next trench, they jump into his first one or rather all that’s left of it and if there’s any of the German Army alive they all get a free trip to Blighty as prisoners of war or if the man that gets them feels like it they get a free trip to Hell where they all should be anyhow.

We got a German \_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ that the Major is trying to have sent thro’ to Edmonton and so if you ever see it stuck up in some window just remember that Bro Jack packed it out of Fritz’s lines and over no mans land to our own trenches.

Well I guess this will be all. You wanted to know what it was like going over and what shells sounded like so I guess this ought to settle the question. It’s the best I can do in a letter anyhow.

So Bonsoir till the next time. Always your loving Bro,

Jack

France, July 12th/17

Dear Stella and Will, -

I got your letter of June 10th about four or five days ago but haven’t had a good change to answer it till tonight.

We are out of the line once more, again, already and darn glad of it.

Say what is Harold Hoble’s address. I may get a chance to see him as they keep the Canadians pretty well all together out here.

I think I mentioned the sox in my letter but I didn’t get them until about the 13th of June I think it was. Parcels always take longer than letters getting here hence the delay.

Much obliged for the spare room to stay overnight when I get back. I can look forward to it till I do get there.

Now believe me you won’t be any more glad to see me again when I get back then I will be to see you and all the rest of the folks when the war is finally settled. Since the Russians have started things moving the prospects sure look lots better and lots of the boys are looking forward to peace this summer.

Well I’ve got a yarn to spin this time. I hope its all right to tell it but I’m not going to mention games or dates so I guess it is safe.

Once upon a time inside the last three years your beloved brother was sitting in a trench when the rations arrived and with them the mail. Now by the way and on the side, various people at home have frequently kicked about going three miles for their mail, I went probably 5 yards to where the ration party was but I’ll never kick about going three miles anymore whateffer. Well to resume, (that’s a good word) I went for the aforementioned mail and rations. How rations come to us in the line in sand bags in pairs fastened together with hay wire, I got two sacks of officers rations and one sack of Signalers and one each of runners rations. Sigs and Runs. tied with said wire. As I was preparing to leave with the four sacks Fritz chose that moment to strafe our part of the line. He took the notion suddenly therefore several small but very nasty shells came almost at the same time. Now a shell has a queer effect on mankind in general much according to circumstances and the lay of the country. Some proceed to push the earth down under them while others reach the nearest shell-hole in least possible time. If a trench is handy most everyone gets there also is [in] a surprisingly short time. Now in this case I was on my way back to the dugout and a deep narrow trench lay in my path about ten feet from where I was when the Bosche commenced his little hymn of hate. I reached the trench in two jumps or less and dropped in. There was a dugout just around the corner and I sure blessed the man that built that dugout. When I got there two fellows were just disappearing underground and I disappeared immediately in their rear. Now this was very unfortunate for these boys as I am not a featherweight. However a few shells cover a multitude of sins, also bruises. But tit for tat and just as I fell on the other two so another shell chased refugee fell on me to say nothing about four sacks of rations.

Well in the long run, it seemed a week, in reality about 5 seconds a calm followed the storm and yours truly crept out of the hole and lost no time getting along to the officers dugout and dropping off their rations and dangling back to fix our own.

Now here arose the difficulty. I have had a considerable some(?) experience with hay wire but it was some different to trying to undo some haywire from two sacks on a dark night expecting Fritz to repeat his funny stunt of decorating the landscape with shell holes and flying scrap iron. I couldn’t get the wire undone so proceeded to carve the sack with my knife. Now I must tell you my knife was newly sharpened but possessed a very blunt point so I’m trying to insert the point in the sack, the blade doubled up and cut my thumb about an inch deep, more or less. Now imagine the scene. The sacks still refusing to be parted, expectations of a whiz-bang landing in the small of my back at any moment and on top of that the cut in my thumb spraying gore over the rations, mail, my hands and the knife of course was reeking with it. I gave the sacks a few more agonized slashes and they undid, whereupon I threw the Sigs rations down their stairs and beat it for our dugout as if the whole German was right on my heels. I got my thumb tied up and while deep in this occupation my expectations were fulfilled and the Huns sent over the second issue of iron rations. I stayed in friend dugout a few minutes and then beat it down the trench to the officers dugout where I was on duty. Now some fellows are more satisfied when things quiet down but there is one thing when shells are dropping round you know where they are going at any rate but if things are quiet you never know where he is liable to start so a fellow is under a continual nervous pressure and on me it is particularly pronounced in a great preference to staying underground where whiz-bangs can’t reach you.

Well this us the end of my yarn and the moral is this – When Fritz takes a notion to decorate your particular vicinity, get to the lowest possible whole in the ground in the shortest possible time and don’t leave it until you have to.

Well that’s about all, noting very interesting happened lately that is anything you can read of in a letter from here.

I have a book here by a well-known French writer who has written a yarn with different pieces about trips thro’ villages we know of, many of which are nothing more than heaps of brick and stone and old walls now. But I’ll tell you about that when I get home.

This is all for now. Remember me to all the folks and you can read this to whoever you think would be interesting.

Love to everyone and a big chunk of the same for yourself.

Bro Jack.

Runners Luck Dugout

France, July 20th/17

Dear Stella and Will, -

A few more lines today because I’m not busy and you know I don’t like not having nothing to do but of course you both know that as I needn’t tell you.

Well we have moved from our comfortable huts and are now residing in a comfortable dugout. No you are quite mistaken we are not in the line but instead very far from it. This is a good place here about 10 ft. by 14 and only three of us in it and we all have a bunk apiece. It’s made of heavy sheet steel in shape like an inverted U 10 ft. wide and about 6 ft. 6 in. across. One end is rather messed up because in the dear dead days beyond recall Fritz hit that end with a shell and since then there is nothing but twisted steel and iron and a few sticks and sandbags occupying that part but the rest is in good condition.

There’s one good thing, we have plenty of company. There are several thousand rats live in the brim end of our dive. That is they live there in the day time. They spend the night running over our beds and any part of your face that happens to be in the way. We have to be very careful where the bread is put at night. Last night it was too near the floor and they eat about half of our ration before we got wise. I’ve shot muskrats and gophers and other things but for real sport you have to come here and lay on a bunk and shoot trench rats with a .303 Service Rifle. Some of them are bigger than muskrats too. I was wishing last night that I had a .22 out here and a fellow sure would have some fun when it got dusk. There are lots of old dugouts and trenches and things here so the country is just honestly alive with rats.

Well enough said on the rat question but I couldn’t help thinking what Evelyn would do if she had to be in a joint like this.

It’s been raining a lot lately but quiet yesterday and as usual everything is all dry again this p.m.

Glad to hear that Will’s business is picking up so good. I hope the war will be over before he will be needed.

Well I guess this is all for the present. Love to anyone that cares to have some of it. Tell May I haven’t killed her Fritz yet but haven’t given up hope. Well bye-bye, I’ll write more next time.

Lovingly Jack.

France, Aug 18th/17

Dear Stella, -

Received your letter of July 25th a couple of days ago and the cake last night both ok. The cake was first rate and the “other runners” all voted you a good cook so I guess it all right and I think I’ve been getting your parcels all regularly up to date but some of my letters might have gone astray and you would never hear about them.

Well Stella, you are, as usual, the only one who has remembered that I have a birthday once a year. So far at any rate because none of the others have tho’t of it yet.

Now as far as having a happy time is concerned just a present we are in a good place to celebrate and are close to a swell big town with lots of pretty French chickens in it. Of course far be it from me to have anything to do with any other girl but still they have got awfully small hands and it is rather nice to hold them in the picture show when the lights go out. Of course you know I wouldn’t do anything like that but was just sort of writing down my thoughts. But honestly, she sure is a sweet little kid and she’s got a lovely smile even if I can’t talk French and she can’t talk English.

You know when a fellow doesn’t see a girl of any kind for about six months he’s liable to do anything when he’s turned loose in a big town with a few Francs and lots of pretty Mademoiselles to smile at.

The “other runners” say, with you, that they wish they knew you and that perhaps when we get back they’ll have a chance to know you then.

Well when you were at Mother’s berry picking I hope you picked some for me. I sure would like to go over on the hill there and pick raspberries but I believe I’d just as soon sit in the sade of some trees somewhere. It’s too hot here to think of berry picking.

I think if it’s just as hot on Sunday as it is today that a nice cool walk on some shady old French road would go down fine especially if a fellow had a good looking Mademoiselle to walk with.

Say Stella, I hope you won’t leave this letter laying around anywhere. Somebody might read it that’s not supposed to hear such things and then there’d be H----- to pay.

Well I think I’ll ring off, you must be tired wading thru all this junk.

Bye Bye for now.

Your loving Bro,

Jack

France, Sept. 10th/17

Dear Stella; -

I guess its over a week since I wrote before but I haven’t had much chance to write sooner.

I got a letter last night from you written on Aug. 8th while you were still out at the Lake [Hastings Lake].

I sure wish I could spend about three days or so at Katy’s with you and May there and of course Evelyn. Wouldn’t I sure have some fun.

No, I haven’t been killed yet and I’d like to know where all these tales start from. It seems that every time there’s a scrap out here someone starts shouting that I’ve been killed. I sure came almighty close to it a few times but old Fritz hasn’t managed to even give me a little wound yet.

We sure had one exciting little trip a short time ago. We were holding the front line and tho’ we had a few casualties the amount of stuff that came over was some bunch believe me, we would have had lots more hurt only he very seldom hit the trench. There are two different kinds of things that land near the front line. One is a small trench mortar shell and looks very much like a pineapple and therefore that is what they are called. Either that or hairy mary’s. Then there is a larger one called a sausage because of it’s shape and if one of them lands near a fellow he thinks the world has exploded and left him sitting on Mars or the moon, but it turns out that he is probably in the bottom of the trench with a few sandbags on top of him.

We had one close call one day. We were coming down the trench, two of us and as that particular part was rather shallow we were not losing much time getting past the place. We came to a deep part and sat down in a funk hole to get our wind and just as we settled down a whizz-bang struck the centre of the path about fifteen feet or so away just where we would have been if we had kept on walking. Of course it was in a way a close shave but there are so many of the same kind of things always happening to everyone that a fellow doesn’t think so much about it.

Well I guess this is about all for now. I’ll write again soon.

Love to the kids and yourself. Tell May I love her in the same old way and she’ll know how much that is. [She was just like a sister strictly platonic].

Bye bye for now.

Your loving bro

Jack

[P.S. by Stella Oct 16th 1961

This May Mathie got married at 45 years of age and is living in California. I saw her last January.]

France, Oct 8th/17

Dear Stella,

The mail came in at last and brought me two letters from you and three from Evelyn so I have enough to keep me busy for a while. Yours were Sept \_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_ so they were quite a while getting here.

So you got the picture I sent all OK and you think I look hard and tough do you. Well I’ll tell you, that snap was taken when we were out on divisional rest for a few weeks and if I look some rough I’m sure I don’t know how I’d look just out of the line some hard rainy trips. I thought it was rather good but I suppose I have changed some since I came here and I wouldn’t notice any change myself.

It’s pretty rotten here now. Raining nearly all the time and cold too. It will likely stay that way for the next six months so we can just grin and bear it. Last trip in we had the best of weather the whole time but it started raining four or five days ago and hasn’t quit yet.

We are living in a barn now with plenty of good straw for a bed and a couple of blankets so we manage to keep pretty warm. It’s pretty rotten with so much rain but the leaks and it’s a million times better here than in the line so we just make the best of it.

We should worry. Tomorrow is pay day so there’ll be, beaucoup vin blanc et vin rouge et Biere Francais. Which means in English, plenty of white wine and red wine and French beer. But don’t squeal on me about it because Evelyn believes I’m teetotal. But Good Lord, if a fellow didn’t slide around to the Estaminets and have a jollification once in a while he’d go plumb loco. It’s pretty hard to get real paralyzed on French wine or beer but easy enough to get sort of snowed up or half canned and feel as if you didn’t give a damn if it rained forever.

I often wonder what Mother would have a fellow do in this God forsaken land where the only warm places are the Estaminets where they sell the joy-stuff. Even if you stay at the billet you can only go to bed or else play poker and then unless you’re lucky you lose the wherewithal to make merry.

Well I was at a show myself a few days ago. The Battle of Arras. I don’t know where they get the name. It would be much better to be entitled “Scenes behind the lines before and after the battle of Arras”. Of course you know the Canadians went over in the battle of Arras when Vimy Ridge was taken so we had some idea of what it was like ourselves. Most of the picture is very life-like and real tho’ especially where it shows the shelling of the gun positions. Those big black shells are no joke, believe me.

The hardest trip I’ve made yet started the day your letter was written, nothing but dodging and ducking from whizz-bangs and trench mortars and other uncomfortable things. I wrote a piece of poetry about it afterwards. Honestly I waxed poetical as I said afterwards. Believe me I wasn’t thinking about any poetry when we were going on those “mighty trips”. Well I’ll tell you Stella, on the side our Company Commander was heard to tell another officer that, “if anyone ever earned a medal it was those runners that were on night duty that trip we made on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” But as it happened Military Medals are issued so many to each battalion and Battn. H.Q. grabbled one and gave it to a Sig. Cpl. For making one trip to the front line during our stay there. Carson and I made six trips all told at night and as there were no medals issued we didn’t get any. However these things often happen and lots of V.C.s even are won and nobody ever is any the wiser. Of course we were only doing what we were told but still, --- oh well what’s the use, that trip is over and we’re still alive and I only hope to God we never have another like it. Of course I can tell you all this but I can’t Evelyn because she things there’s no danger in my job and I hope she’ll keep on thinking that way.

There isn’t as much danger as the other boys run into at times but once in a while we’ll get a trip like that one and catch particular h-----. You see our job consists mostly of taking messages to Battn. Headquarters while up the line and if Fritz starts shelling it’s not the front line he hits but the communication trenches leading to the rear. Consequently, he cuts our telephone wire and then its Runner, Battalion H.Q. and away we go shells or no shells.

Well I guess you’ll be pretty tired wading thru all this guff so I’ll change the subject.

What did you have for dinner yesterday? I bet you couldn’t beat ours (Sunday). Beefsteak, mashed spuds, carrots, turnips, cabbage, bread, butter, jam and tea. Of course the meat and spuds etc. are issued but as for the rest, well the French people here grow a pretty good crop of carrots, turnips and cabbage and the nights are very dark now – a – days. There’s a pretty good chance of pinching a fat goose too but the Lord knows how we’d ever get it cooked on the quiet.

I sure hope I’ll be back to get some of the pickles but the war looks like it was good for a few years yet.

Poor Evelyn, I guess she’s pretty lonesome all right. I wish I could get back to cheer her up some. Still they say the first five years of the war are the worst so that will only be two more. [Poor Evelyn! She was two timing him even then – Stella 1979].

No the cake was Tres Biens or otherwise first rate or very good or Jake-a-loo or whatever you like in English.

I was out shooting a while ago too. French partridges. Small but very good to eat. There’s none around here but lots up the line. We shoot them or rather shoot at them with a revolver as a .303 goes too far and you might snipe some poor devil a mile away. I’ve got a revolver of my own now. We’re allowed to carry them on our job. A .45 caliber, regular piece of artillery. That’s the size of the military issue. Made to hit hard or not at all.

Well bye bye for now Old Kid. Cheer up the war will be over before 1930 anyhow.

We’re having a bear of a time even if it does rain 25 hours every day. Tomorrow’s pay-day and tomorrow night will be wetter than tonight rain or no rain. As they say about the French front There’ll be “Heavy fighting in Champagne”.

Carson just came in with your parcel. It’s first rate, just as good as the day you put it up. The runners send you their thanks again and also lots of love. Will try to get a chance to get all our pictures taken together as soon as possible.

Well, I hope you don’t get tired reading these few pages, some sensible and mostly not. I’ll see if I can send some saner stuff next time I write.

Lots of love, kiss the kids for me.

Lovingly,

Jack

P.S. Tell Will, Hello for me and that he’d better stay where he is until he has to come over here.

Jack.

France Oct 12th/17

Dear Stella, -

Well pay day is over and all the effects thereof. There sure was a terrific barrage on night before last and tho’ I was in the thick of the bombardment I came out safe and managed to get to bed and get my boots off too.

We started in with 5.9’s labeled Champagne and then went to the estaminet and had beaucoup biere Francais as I said. Home when the place closed and thru more bottles of Champagne and some vin Blanc to finish up on. I was badly shell shocked and my nerves shaken so bad that I really don’t remember what happened after that clearly. I know I was gambling and won an awful pile of francs to buy more wine. However I finally got to bed and slept till the morning tho’ I sure was feeling pretty punk in the morning.

Well everything comes to an end some time or other and so we are back to normal again. It seems the four of us take turns at it. One of us were paralyzed a couple days ago. Myself night before last and one of the others last night. Only one left and he can swallow booze by the jug full so I guess he’ll be safe.

Anyhow we’re all about broke now so we’ll have to wait for next pay day.

3:30 p.m.

Just back from the ranges. Lord! But it sure can rain in this country. We just got through shooting about 20 rounds and it started on to rain. Of course we came home but the rain didn’t stop because we did and naturally we were beaucoup wet by the time we got home. It sure is a cheerful country in the fall but we should worry I guess this is the last winter of this war.

I borrowed 10 francs today ($2) so there’s sure to be another bombardment tonight tho’. I don’t think there’ll be any champagne in this one since it’s 7 francs a bottle and it takes about five or six bottles to satisfy this little gang.

Do you remember how you addressed that note in your parcel of short-bread. You put it “Dear Runners”. Well when I read that out to the other fellows I immediately lost all control of the parcel and Scott even went so far as to say that he thought I had already eaten my share and that the rest belonged to him and Carson. When I offered some to one of the officer’s batman Scott says “By Jove he’s got his gaul, giving away our cake that way.” It was all a joke you see but at the same time the runners sure look forward to the parcels from Snyders sister and as they are always tied up like a bale of hay they are easily recognized. Scott said he thought I’d been putting one over on the rest of the runners and that he believed that all the parcels had been addressed to the runners and I’d been hanging onto them myself and just giving them each some.

We lost one of our regular squad a couple or three weeks ago. Stannard went down the line with pleurisy but since we have another one in his place the set of four is still complete. We’ll be able to get a picture of the four of us as there is nothing in this burg except three estaminets, one church and about two dozen houses with two or three barns per house. There isn’t even any fruit left. That was nearly all cleaned up the first few days here and tho’ the walnuts were rather plentiful for a while they are all gone now. We’ve been contemplating pinching a chicken but have no way of cooking it. Well I guess this is all for now. I don’t know which to do. Go to the estaminet or play poker tonight. I’ll write soon anyway and let you know how the evening was passed.

Loving Bro, Jack.

France Nov. 3rd/17

(Battle of Ypres)

Dear Stella and Will, -

Well I’m still alive tho’ how it happened I’m sure I couldn’t say. We were sniped at and whizz-banged and 5.9’d and everything imaginable and to top the lot we were gassed on the way out.

Still there’s a few of the battalion left and anyone who came out counts themselves lucky with a capital L. Everyone says it was worse than the Somme and anyhow it was the worst smash-up the old \_\_\_\_th Battalion ever had yet. The queerest part is that I’m still alive but, my God, we left an awful bunch of fine boys up there that will never come out again.

Stella, it was awful, men dropping or getting blown up on every side of us and it was just a miracle that anyone came out alive.

Speaking of narrow escapes, I was in a shell hole with a few of our boys all taking cover and being a runner I had to dangle off the headquarters with another of the boys and when I came back they were all killed. All still sitting or crouching in our little bit of trench but all dead, killed by one shell that burst right alongside of them. It certainly made one sort of go to pieces. All good friends of mine and some of the best boys in the world. I sure didn’t stick around there long.

Only two runners left now. Scott and Carson were both wounded and got out safely. That leaves myself and Marrow still on the job.

This is the third battle I’ve been in now, Vimy Ridge, Avion near Lens and now this. I’ll be able to tell you the part we were fighting in after a while. I’d like to tell you how many are left and how many we had going in but I had better not. I can too. We went in with the same number of men as the number on the badge of Bert Wood’s battalion [194]. Get that and we came out of the line with as many men as there is miles between Edmonton and Atkinsons

place [29]. That was our company and I know two of the other companies had less than us. One of them had only a third of what we had.

Well I guess that’s enough of war for a while. If you have any influence with Hilliard for the love of Pete try to keep him from enlisting.

I had a letter from Uma and one from Mother the same time as yours. It was too bad about Uma’s baby. It seems as if this wasn’t the only place where people died.

Isn’t that rotten of Mrs. Woods? I didn’t think things had gone as far as that.

Well I guess that’s about all for this time. I know it’s not a very cheerful letter but I don’t feel cheerful by any means.

So by-by for now.

I’ll write again soon.

Lovingly Jack

France. Nov. 24th/17

Dear Stella and Will, -

I don’t know whether it’s a week since I wrote before or not but I’ll take a chance on it since I have another letter from you here.

We are still out on our rest and we’ll likely be here for a few days yet and maybe a lot longer than that. I should worry if we stay here forever as far as that goes because we’ve a good place here and pretty good grub so there’s nothing to kick about. They are talking of starting a Corporals mess too so if that goes through we will be “Tres Biens”.

Some of the boys say it will be a mess alright. But I guess we can hold it down.

Parcel received OK and the cabbage and beet chowder and also the jam were safe and sound though and of course both have disappeared by now.

They sure seem to be up against it for men over there nowadays. No men for dances. But I guess if conscription is in good and solid there’ll be a few more taken away.

I don’t blame Jim for wanting to stay there after being over here once. I thought I could catch a Blighty last trip but nothing doing I never had a piece near me let alone get hit.

Yes you told me that Harold Noble had been killed but it wasn’t a surprise to me as he was a pilot in the Flying Corps and that isn’t exactly a healthy job. My pen is on the brim so I’ll have to go back to the pencil.

George is in the 4th division and I don’t know where they are at so haven’t had a chance to see him.

No I don’t think there is anything special that I want here. Just keep up the good work with the homemade candy and I’ll be jake. Homemade candy and a package of Bull Durham once in a while and I’ll be perfectly satisfied.

Well I guess this is all for not. I’ll write again soon.

Yours as always

Jack

France Dec. 7th/17

Dear Stella,

Received your letter of Nov. 2nd last night and it sure was a big one.

Say, you sure can hand out some little old sermon now can’t you. Don’t worry, there’s no danger of me running into anything of the kind you are thinking of. We sure did have some great old sessions at the time I wrote those letters but it ended there and I’ve only had about four drinks in the last two weeks. Of course I have had some most paralyzing old stews on but it’s only once in a long time and it never worries me in between times. Dad Stevens is absolutely rotten with booze and so can’t keep away from it. So cheer up, I’m not gone to the dickens all together so there’s hope for me yet.

Yes I made up that piece of poetry myself but I forgot where it went to though I had a hunch I sent it to you. The time I wrote those letters were rather dim and hard to remember. I hope you hang on to it because I’d like to have it when I get home again.

Now about those socks. It is quite true that socks are issued here sometimes plenty of them and sometimes very few and far apart so that a couple of extra pair in a kit comes in very handy at times. Again when we go for a bath, socks are turned in dirty and another pair issued clean. That’s the reason why it is not advisable to send home knit or very good socks here as they can only be worn until dirty and then turned in. So a cheap pair are just as useful as an extra good pair and not nearly as expensive.

Yes I got your parcel of candy OK as soon as I came out of the big Passchendaele scrap and it sure did go down good.

An officer’s batman is a sort of a servant. Cleans his boots and equipment, and generally makes himself useful in looking after his officer.

Some class to you with your swell kicks etc. and I sure do want to get a picture of you and Will. There are so many of the boys who sort of know you by letter and parcel that they want to see what that sister of mine does look like.

I haven’t received the cake you spoke of but parcels are nearly always about two days behind so I’m looking for it either today or tomorrow.

Well I guess this is about all for now. I’ll write again soon. Don’t worry about that trouble you wrote about. There isn’t the slightest possibility of me ever turning into another Stevens. Only a fellow feels like tearing things wide open once in a while to relieve his feelings.

Bye Bye for now. Give my love to Betty and May of you get a chance.

Your loving bro

Jack

France. Jan. 10th/18

Dear Stella, -

“Good ole France”. Who said we wanted to stay in London anyhow.

Just lit last night and won’t be going up the line for a while yet so will have a chance to rest up after my strenuous trip to Blighty.

I’ve got umpteen letters to answer as my mail was stored up till I’d get back. I think I got 19 letters all told and three parcels. Yours of the milk etc. and one from Flora and one from Mother Hill.

Thanks for the stuff and the Jack C’s. They will come in handy.

I haven’t had a chance to see either the 44th or the 48th yet but may soon.

Thanks for the clipping from the Journal. Some class getting that much space in our one and only Edmonton Journal. It’s too bad they didn’t get it just right tho’!

I can’t write very well here, I’ll try to finish this in the morning.

Jan 11th – This is sure some day. It’s been raining most all morning and everything is nice and juicy by now. We’ve had about three weeks hard frost but a sudden thaw and you know the usual result.

I sure had a good time in Blighty tho’! I ran into Clement Shroeter and spent the last few days of my leave at his mother’s place in London. They certainly gave me a good time. Lots of young folks and I was to a dance Saturday night and they put up a party for me on Sunday so I met a lot of nice folks. I’ll know what to do next time I get a pass. [1979 Clem died about 4 years ago]

[PS by Stella Oct 16. 1961 – Clement Schroeter lives in Edmonton and has a summer cottage at Alberta Beach near mine. His sister Eda and her daughter are friends of mine yet.]

This was pay day again so we’re all feeling good again and I expect the troops will be hitting the high spots but tonight.

We’ll be having another rest pretty soon now so you can see we are having it a lot easier than last winter.

No, our big fight I told you about took place near Ypres not Lens. I’ve got over most of the effect of that one but these kind of things are never forgotten. Especially when a fellow loses nearly all his friends.

Well Stella I guess this is all for now. I’ll write again soon.

Remember me to all the folks.

Your loving brother,

Jack.

France March 1st/18

Dear Stella, -

I received your letter of Jan. 23rd and was very glad to get it too.

Sorry my letters I wrote while on leave didn’t suit you. Cheer up, though the females of London haven’t done me any harm anyhow.

Sorry to hear about Betty. I expect it’s her you mean. That’s pretty bad and very few get rid of it very easily. Another case of “Damaged Goods” I suppose.

So Hilliard is working in town now. Probably that’s why he hasn’t written for a long while.

Wish I could go for a skate somewhere. It’s snowing here today to beat four of a kind but it is melting as fast as it comes down and the ground is in an awful mess.

I heard from both Flora and Gertie yesterday, also a letter from Uma and one from Evelyn. That’s not so works for one day. Uma told me about a farewell dance they had for the mail-man and a collection of $50 and a watch. Poor man he had to go to war. That sort of thing makes me sore all over. The young fellows from all around Cooking Lake and Tofield got up an enlisted in 1915, most of them and all went voluntarily and then this bomb proof guy sticks around till he can’t stay any longer and when they finally grab him by conscription what do the folks at Cooking Lake do. Get up a farewell dance and present him with a purse of $50 and a wrist watch. Pretty soft. What did the boys get who went overseas in 1915 and 16. Folks said they were a bunch of damn fools and I suppose thought it a good riddance. Then they give a dirty conscript all sorts of things. It makes me sick. They should have pinned a white feather in his hat and kicked him out of the country. Never mind I don’t envy any of the first draft of conscripts the time they will have when they land in different battalions over here. A conscripts life is going to be a pretty lonely one believe me for a few months.

What’s the matter with Uma and Katie and Walter now? You say the usual thing. In what way? Work and horses and hours on “other things”.

Well bye-bye for now. I’ll write again soon.

Lovingly Jack.

France. April 6th/18

Dear Stella, -

I haven’t had a chance to write since the last letter so if this one is a little overdue you’ll know I couldn’t help it.

I’ve been on the move up from the Base for nearly a week and have just settled down here long enough to get paid and write a couple of letters and then I’m off for the line again, with the best of luck.

We had a great time coming up on the train. Nearly 40 of us in a small box car and all as happy as the birds in May.

I’m not sorry to be back to the Battn. again tho’ because we were knocked around here and there and fall in now and then and have another roll-call and all the time practically nothing to eat but biscuits and a little jam and a lot of bully beef.

However I’m back among the mud and shells and not exactly sorry because I’m used to it all and a fellow don’t get bothered nearly as much as when you’re moving.

Moving in this place puts me in mind of a spring house-cleaning. You’re always in everyone’s way and everyone is sending you somewhere else and it’s lots worse standing around waiting for orders than it is going anyplace.

Well bye-bye for now and Stella, I’ll write again as soon as I get a chance. It may be a few days and it may be a couple of weeks so don’t get sore if you don’t here soon.

Lots of love to the kids and remember me to Will.

Your loving brother

Jack

Got a parcel a few minutes ago. Thanks for it. Haven’t opened it yet but I will write more later. Jack.

France, April 25th/18

Dear Stella,

Just got an old letter from you that was on the way for a long time.

I remember the letter you speak about. It was just one page full of a bawling out. I suppose I deserved it but often gets my goat trying to write anything like a letter. Glad you have changed your mind tho’.

Yes I got your Christmas cake and the sox away back in December before I went on leave. I know I wrote and thanked you because I always do. Maybe you never got that particular letter tho’.

No a Military Medal is not a D.C.M. There are lots of M.M.’s handed out but very few D.C.M.’s. A Military Medal is just a simple \_\_\_\_\_\_ silver medal about as big as a silver dollar and is engraved with an inscription, “For Bravery in the Field.” Glad to hear that Albert got his. They are coveted tho’ most fellows will tell you they are so common they come up with the rations. Still you never hear of any man who is not proud of his.

I was recommended for one at Passchendaele but the recommendation was all I ever got as there weren’t enough to go around.

Oh believe me there’s nobody wants me to get back where I can dance more than I do myself. And as far as getting hit in the legs goes I ain’t particular where I get it so long as I can make Canada from it.

Well bye-bye for now. I’ll write again soon.

Your loving brother, Jack

France

July 9th/18

Dear Stella,

I guess you will be thinking that I have either forgotten you or else be dead by this time. It’s a long time since I wrote surely but I can explain my silence as I guess it will be alright.

Right after I wrote last we moved and were on the hop a couple of days and then went up the line before we had tome to settle down anywhere.

I wrote a long letter to Evelyn from the trenches and intended writing you the day following but when I woke up next morning I had a headache and pains in my eyes and my joints were all sore and in various other ways I realized I had the Spanish Flu.

Everyone is getting it or was getting it about that time so of course I had to take my turn also.

Well to cut a long story short I came out of the trenches to a place where they brought all the sick men and was sick enough for a couple of days. Then when I was around again I found there wasn’t a Y.M. within miles of us and no canteens or French shops so I put off writing for the simple reason that I couldn’t get paper or materials for love or money. A few days ago or rather day before yesterday the Y.M. opened up here, but last night I was all in having just finished a whole days trench digging therefore didn’t feel like writing. That brings us to this morning and so here I am sitting down to write with the knowledge that I have at least one thousand letters all shouting for an answer. Yours is first because I haven’t written for two weeks and Evelyn comes next as it’s over a week since I wrote to her and after that the others will come as I happen to pick them up.

Thanks for the news from the Lake [Cooking Lake – the homestead]. I didn’t know many they spoke of but I expect there will often be people I know spoken of and anyhow I like reading it just because it’s about our one and only Cooking Lake.

Yes I know about the soldiers farm and loan but I haven’t thought over it or made any plans because I may take up a homestead over here yet and then all the loans in the world won’t be much use to me.

They give you a free grant of land here too and put a fence around it too and a little white cross at one end if you’re lucky and they find enough of you to bury. Of course sometimes accidents do happen and a 5.9 spreads a fellow all over the place. In that case they pick you up in a sand bag if they can find enough to pick up.

So you see I’m not losing any sleep over the question of what I’ll do with the money if I do get a lone. Time enough when I am on my way back.

I expect the part of my letter that was censored that day was the place where I told you the day we moved on or something like that. I expect I said “we landed here last night” or some such thing and as the letter was dated that would be sort of conveying intelligence of the letter fall into the hands of a submarine.

No I didn’t know Walter Baines had a youngster nor Sid Edwards wither for that matter. I never get any news of the Lake except what you send.

I haven’t got toe parcels yet but it’s only a month since they were sent so I will be expecting them wither tonight or tomorrow as that is Canadian mail days.

I’m just as satisfied that we can’t change places for an hour or two as you suggest. For one thing I can hear an odd naval shell dropping somewhere out between us and the trenches and that might not agree with your peace of mind. For another, I’d sooner stay here for the duration and then go back for good than be transplanted there for a couple of hours and then come away again. (There goes another 5.9 or rather it just arrived out in front somewhere. Another.)

You tell Will for me to stay where he is allowed to. There’s nothing to see in this country except ruins and shell holes anyhow. (There’s Fritz shelling one of our aeroplanes now and as usual not coming within a mile of it.)

Well I guess this is all for now. I’m writing this in the Y.M. tent and the phonograph is busy playing “Ireland must be Heaven”. While I’ve been writing this letter I’ve counted over a dozen or fifteen shells that I heard burst out in front. There’s another now. None came our way but I can hear them coming and bursting and every little whole I can hear Fritzies anti-aircraft shells bursting away up in the sky somewhere.

She sure is some life and so long as we’re here (another 5.9) and I don’t have to work, I should worry.

Well bye-bye for now. I’ll write again soon.

You’re loving brother

Jack.

There’s another 5.9.

France. July 15th/18

Dear Stella and Will, -

It’s not a week since I wrote my last but I have no particular business this morning to transact so I’ve a few hours to kill somehow.

I got your letter of June 21st a few days ago so I can ans. it anyhow.

Cheer up, you wish I could see that house of yours. Of course I’ll see it and maybe it won’t be very long from now either. According to that geezer you write about the war will be over in October and that’s only a few more months.

What battalion is George Noble in and what company? If I knew that I’d be able to see him sometime.

You should not be disappointed when my letters don’t come thru regularly because lots of times I can’t write for over a week at a stretch.

Did I tell you about our little trip over the top up here a while ago, I think I told you about in the letter that I sent to 96th St. by mistake. Well I’ll tell you some more anyhow, zero hour was 11:45. That means at 11:45 the barrage opened up and the boys crawled over. This was night time remember not daylight. Well we were all crouched in the jumping off trench waiting for the artillery to start something. We had just got settled when they sure did start.

Now a creeping barrage is a lovely thing to read about and to read how the boys followed up the barrage to the enemies trenches and all that guff but doing it is different. In the first place a barrage is made up of whiz-bangs, a very small shell that goes almost straight with the speed of a bullet. Well these shells were bursting in his front line and the idea was to get as close as possible to the enemies lines without getting in wrong with said whiz-bangs. Then just as soon as the guns raised the range and started pounding his second line the boys all tumbled into the first line to clean up anything that was left. A few Fritzes killed by shells about a dozen prisoners and a machine gun were the reward of our troubles to nothing about several dozens that tried to get away and never made the grade.

There was no time to think about anything if anyone was to ask me what I was thinking about I couldn’t tell them. It was dark to begin with then there was the smoke fumes from our own shell and Fritz’s which had started dropping around by this time and then there was the mud and dust thrown up by the shells and fellows going steadily ahead at a walk, prisoners coming back, wounded being brought out and everything so noisy that you couldn’t hear yourself think.

At 1:45 the recall was sent up (a rocket) and everyone came back however they happened to be formed up. We withdrew and left the others to hold the line while we went back to our different dives to rest up. The raid was over. Now for the good it did. When we went over, the trenches were alive with Germans and when our relief went over a while after they met very little resistance. Why? Because we showed him what we could do and that was lots for him. He beat it before we had a chance to repeat the dose and took up a position farther back. That’s the way it goes. The Allies drive the Germans out of some part of a trench or perhaps out of several trenches on maybe a mile front or more and the German newspapers claim their brave soldiers retired to a stronger position because the defences they had been holding were very weak.

We have Fritz forty ways and he knows it but it’s going to be the food proposition and the submarine menace that will decide this war if it lasts much longer.

Well bye-bye for now. Love to everybody that wants any of it.

Your loving Bro,

Jack

August 12th/18

Dear Stella,

Well we’ve just been thru’ a real, old fashioned, open warfare battle and believe me, she was a bear.

I was on a machine gun crew number 2 on the gun for the trip and we started over the top at the place where one of the other brigades had quit. It was pretty soft for a few hundred yards. Just like maneuvers. We walked through wheat fields and I picked wheat as I went along and to all appearances there wasn’t a Fritz for miles. There wasn’t a shot fired till we reached a wood that stretched right across our front and we no sooner got to the wood then we head his machine guns getting busy and our boys started taking pot shots at something, we couldn’t see what. Our platoon was in support so we couldn’t see what was going on. There was a valley on the far side of the wood and the bush reached to the bottom of the slope and Fritz had his guns on the other hill across from the trees.

Well when we came in right between the trees, the fire(?) started and the bullets began to sing. The machine guns weren’t so bad because they generally travel low but the snipers were busy and believe me he can sure shoot straight. We ran down the hill and reached the bottom where there were a few holes and I went to see there were no Heinies in them and my loss, No. 1 on the gun came along behind with the gun. I just got to the door of this hole and a bullets comes z-z-z-zup against the bivvy. Frank (No. 1) said OH! Rather surprised like and dropped the gun, twisted around and sat down hard. I said “Where abouts Frank?” (I knew he was hit) and he told me in the side. Just then Fritz tried to get me and missed by about an inch so I beat it into the bivvy and called to Frank to come in, he couldn’t get up tho’ so I beat it out again and pilled him inside, dressed the wound, (it was a peach, right thru the thigh), got his revolver and the machine gun and away I went to go look for the guy that did the sniping. I didn’t find him tho’ but I got a few others so it was pretty square. There isn’t much more to tell. We were held up again after that and things looked pretty bad for a while. His machine guns were busy and some of the boys were getting hit right and left. Just as we were about to decide what we should do, someone looked away over to the left and there was five tanks coming up and firing as they came. That was all. The battle was over and when Fritz saw those tanks he never stopped to wave his hand. I’ll tell you the remainder and what the cavalry did in my next. I’ve no more paper.

Love from Jack.

Aug 15th/18

Dear Stella,

I was going to tell you about the rest of our battle in this letter but there wasn’t much more to tell.

After the tanks came in sight we had no more opposition and reached our objective by simply walking up to it. We were supposed to establish some kind of a line there and we had hardly settled down and got our wind again when the cavalry rode up. I don’t suppose I should say how many there were passed us but if the censor objects he can rub it out. It was reported that \_\_\_\_\_\_ cavalry rode through our front and they all passed within a few yards of where we were sitting. I believe it was the finest sight I’ve ever seen. Canadian and Imperial Cavalry they all came by. They were in a hurry to meet the enemy and the first bunch went tearing across the valley in front of us and ran into a machine gun nest and came tearing back to cover again. After that they all formed up in some “dead ground” (places behind hills that are not swept by bullets). Hundreds of them. Then about fifty would line up and go charging across the valley at a dead gallop to some more dead ground on the far side of the valley. It was a grand sight, especially the Lancers, every man carried a lance with here and there, the troops colors. By and by they went off up the hill and soon after we saw them charging alone to top of the next ridge in the face of the machine gun fire and although horses dropped here and there and occasionally a rider less horse came trotting back, they reached the wood and presently one cavalryman came riding back driving a bunch of Fritz’s in front of him. Then some field artillery galloped up and unlimbered(?) right alongside of us, swung their guns around, layed the sights and each one tore off a couple of rounds, then hooked up again and away they went up the hill and over to the next valley and we heard them firing again over there. When we first reached our objective I started to dig a hole for a machine gun post and though it only took about half an hour, before I was done the field artillery had gone on about a kilometer ahead of us and another division came up and went through us and the first thing we knew instead of being in the front firing line we were out of the war altogether. That night we went to bed close to where we stopped and when we woke up in the morning our battalion transport had come up and the kitchens had a hot breakfast of porridge and bacon all ready to ear. War, why it was a picnic compared to Vimy Ridge, Lens and Passchendaele.

The difference lay in the fact that instead of pushing him 1200 yards in one day we sprung a surprise attack and drove him 12 kilometers in one kick-off and he was so astonished that he never stopped running for miles.

It was our first go at open warfare and believe me it sure is great. Of course the bullets in places were singing past like flies or maybe like hail but they don’t get a fellows goat like shells and he’ll take bigger chances and think nothing of it. It’s marvelous how many bullets can fly around a fellow without one hitting him.

Well this is all for now. Stella, if we have any more interesting doings, I’ll let you know. Will you please let May Mathie read this letter and my last one because it would about play me out to write another account of the scrap and May wants to hear about our doin’s out here.

Bye-bye now. Love from Jack

Ward 7, Queens Hospital

Frognal, Sidcup.

Kent, England

[No date but beginning of Sept 1918 time frame as he was wounded 28 August 1918]

Dear Stella, -

Well I stopped a hot one at last. Got into an argument with a machine gun bullet and came off second best. Result, I got a compound fracture of the lower jaw, had my throat, or rather the side of my neck split open and a hole bored through my shoulder. Not at all dangerous but most disagreeable. Can’t eat, can’t talk properly, can just stagger around a bit so far and can scarcely use my left arm. Pretty good job for one billet isn’t it. It went in through my lower lip, busted my jaw and knocked three teeth out then came almost out underneath but travelled near enough to the surface of my neck to break the skin in a long slash from my jaw to my shoulder. It went in my shoulder at the base of the neck and came out about four or five inches further back and as far as I know it’s going yet.

My shoulder is all healed up except for one spot that is still running and the cut in my neck is healing fast so things are not so bad. Of course my jaw bothers be a few. It’s not like an ordinary break that can be put in splints and let go because when a fellow gets a broken jaw in the army the bullet or shrapnel always takes a piece or pieces of the bone along with it and then they have to graft in a new piece of bone. First the broken boke has to heal as it lays, no danger of it setting because the two ends won’t meet unless the jaw is in splints.

Well after it’s all healed up inside and no more danger of it bleeding again they put you to sleep and cot out all the unnecessary jaw. (Big job to do that to me). Then they send you away on leave till you’re all healed up again and then they graft some new jaw on and you go on leave again.

Life in this place is one continual round of operations and leaves. The next job I have to have done is to have a few extra teeth pulled and that will most likely hurt some.

We should worry though. I’ll never see France again and huge chances of being in Canada before Christmas 1919. A fellow spends about six to twelve months in hospital with a jaw and some are longer.

Well bye by now I’ll write again soon,

Lovingly Jack

Sept 14th/18

Dear Stella,

I’m afraid my letters are going rather irregularly these days but I’m only writing as little as possible.

I’m still going strong. My neck and shoulder are healing pretty good and my jaw is in splints now. Pleasant things, splints for the jaw. They look like a bunch of gold or silver teeth. Made of metal and fit tight over the teeth. They put one set on your lower jaw and one on the upper and then they fasten them together with pins worked like a hinge. These have to stay on the jaws about three months and all that time you can’t open your mouth a fraction of an inch. They only way I hear is through a hole were the bullet knocked out three or four teeth and a small bit of jaw bone. It’s about an inch long and half an inch wide. Of course you’ll think that’s big enough to get in bread and all sorts of stuff but since we can’t open our mouths therefore we can’t chew so all we can eat is slops. Oh! Believe me, it’s a helluva war. Porridge for breakfast, sloppy hash and some soft pudding for dinner, like rice or tapioca. Bread and milk for tea and soup and bread for supper. A mug of egg and milk at 9:30 a.m. and one again at 9:00 p.m.

That’s our menu, it will continue to be the same for the next three months.

I had a letter from you and one from Evelyn this morning, the first Canadian mail I’ve had since I was wounded. Evelyn seems to have had a pretty good time at Katie’s place while they were all out there.

Well I guess this is about all for now. I’ll write some more sooner or later, most likely sooner.

Bye-bye for now. Lots of love from

Jack.

Queens Hospital

Sidcup, Kent

November 2nd/18

Dear Stella, -

I got your letter of October 5th a couple days ago but had written you a few days before that so put off writing again till now.

Glad you liked my description of our open warfare battle. Guess I won’t get a chance to describe any more battles open or otherwise.

As for talking with my mouth shut, it’s easy when you get used to it. I had a letter from Hilliard the same day as yours and he was telling me all about the duck and chicken shooting there was going on these days.

I guess I’ll be home in time to catch the first ones in spring and maybe a few rats as well. The way the papers talk these days I shouldn’t be surprised to see peace pretty soon. In that case the troops will be going home and yours truly will be still holding down a bed in the hospital. That sure would be tough wouldn’t it.

So Merton Poole is gone too. Cooking Lake district has certainly caught it since the war started. As far as I know there’s only two of the boys in France now and that’s Archie Ferguson and Sandy Bass (Boss?) I believe there is one of the Owen boys there too but I’m not sure. There are five that I know well who are killed now, all from around home. Tom Atkinson, Alex Gladue, Billy Young, Merton Poole and one of the Owen boys. Then I guess there must be a few more wounded and some are back there again.

I’m not sorry I got mine when I did. They have had some awful scrapping out there during October and a bunch of our battalion got wiped out so maybe if I hadn’t landed a Blighty I might have got my head knocked off or lost a couple legs or so.

I’ve been thanking my stars ever since I got hit that it wasn’t any worse.

I’ve seen so many jaw cases that were awful looking sight that it made me shake hands with myself a good few times.

Everything remains as quiet as per usual here. Nothing much to do except eat and sleep. There’s so much flu floating around that they have but the shows and dances out of bounds for soldiers so there’s nothing to go to town for.

Well I guess this is all for now. Write soon and as often as usual.

Your loving brother

Jack.

I’m putting a letter for Dad in yours as I don’t know his address.

J.

Queens Hospital

Jan. 22nd/19

Dear Stella and Will, -

I’m rather fed up today tho’ I shouldn’t be. I’ve got about a year more of hospital life to put in and have to have some bone grafted into my jaw. It wasn’t the doctors fault but mostly because there was too much jaw blown down the trench and not enough left at the fracture to grow together again. I’ll have a piece of spare rib stuck in and fastened there with hay-wire and then be in splints for the next seventeen years. Course that’s rather exaggerated but I’ll have a bone graft and splints on for about six months.

I suppose you are rather amazed at my last lot of letters so I’ll tell you straight that its all off between Evelyn and I. She told Uma she wouldn’t live on the homestead and was never going to have any kids. Well I don’t want my wife to have a litter or a brood or anything of that sort but I think there’s something wrong with a girl who doesn’t want at least one or two.

However she needn’t worry she’ll never live on my homestead and never be the mother of any kids of mine. Last but not least Uma says she has dyed her hair red. Now what the mischief does she want red hair for. I hear she’s also been going the pace and I’d like to know if you knew anything about it.

Got your parcel yesterday when I came back to hospital. Thanks very much for everything. Strikes me I owe you more than I’ll ever be able to pay back for parcels and letters since I left Canada. You’re the only one who writes regularly and you write about three letters to Evelyn’s one and you’ve got more love (don’t laugh) in yours than she has in hers. Yours always end “your loving sister” while Evelyn’s are always “as ever” and begin “Dear Jack”. Wish I’d never been such a damn fool as to get married to her.

Well so long for now, I’ll write often now I’m back in hospital again.

Your loving brother

Jack

13 Connaught Place

Marble Arch W.2

London

Feb. 3, 1919

Dear Stella, -

Don’t know when I wrote last but I guess I owe you a letter anyhow.

I’m on two months leave again and got a job in an office in London to help out financially and to occupy spare time. Life these days is just one continual round of leave and pleasure. This job is simply to keep me busy in spare hours and is only 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday afternoons off. I get £3.10 from my Army pay a month. £4. Subsistence allowance and this job comes to about £5 a month. Total £12.10 a month or $62.50. Not so dusty is it. All I’ve got to pay out it 17/6 per week for room and breakfast and dinners come to about 14/ a week. Total about £6.10 a month leaving me £6 to spend.

I won’t have an operation on my jaw for at least 3 months yet and may not have it before I leave for Canada in June.

I understand we are going home in June and very likely I’ll be in Hospital in Toronto for seven or eight months. From what I’m told now I don’t much expect my final discharge before January or February 1920. Although I expect I’ll get a good long leave home soon after I land at Toronto or rather as soon as my jaw is fit to no longer need attendance after my operations. There is only about four of them to have. One where they remove the piece of bone for the bone graft probably in the shin or rib. One to remove my scar. One to graft in the piece of bone in my jaw and one to straighten my nose. Capt. Risdon (the specialist) said he was going to operate on my nose and take out the half left turn there is in it at present before he sent me out in the world to earn my living again.

Well I guess this is all for now Stella. I’m writing this at Marble Arch Maple Leave Club Oxford St. Guess you’ve read of Oxford St. This is at the corner of Oxford St. and Park Lane, overlooking Hyde Park. My room is at Hammersmith about a three penny ride from here on the bus or on the underground tube railway. I know all about, Strand and Piccadilly and Leicester Square that the Irishman heard about in Tipperary. They’re busy places but for a good time on a little money a man wants to get away from the rush and roar of this burg and a long ways away too. They know too much about the army pay of Colonial troops in this town and charge accordingly. All they need to see is the Canada or Australia on a soldiers shoulder and the prices rise immediately.

Well so long Stella. See you some Sunday next week.

Love from

Jack.

March 13/1919

Dear Stella, -

Thank the Lord you aren’t sore anymore. I began to think you were never going to have any more to do with me.

Everything is going good here and things are mostly as usual. My jaw still waggles around if I give it a shove but otherwise its all right.

Mollie and I are up at a Club for Soldiers and their wives or friends at Marble Arch, Oxford Street and Mollie is using my pen to write to her Mother, therefore the pencil.

The Good Lord knows when I’ll get back to Canada as there’ll be Canucks here till August and I expect we’ll be the last to leave. My pass is up the 31st of March nearly three weeks yet but I hope to get an extension till the first of May anyhow so I can go home with Mollie for Easter. I suppose you’ll know what she’s like by the time you get this if you have seen Bert or Uma or anyone that has seen them. Thank the Lord I was properly introduced to her at her Mothers place by her Mother and she’s just the right girl in every way Stella. I don’t know what Bert thought of it all as he didn’t pass any opinion but I expect you’ll be able to judge for yourself before many moons. You can be jolly sure she’ll be in Edmonton by the time I get my final discharge and come home for good. I expect Bert will say she’s not at all beautiful and she isn’t. I didn’t fall in love with her looks and beauty is only skin deep anyhow and Mollie is the best little girl in this world in every other way bar none.

Her Mother knows all there is to know and tho’ she doesn’t believe in divorce she isn’t going to make any objections if Millie wants to marry a divorced man and in this case Mollie most decidedly does.

Hope Will is over his troubles in health now and doesn’t need any more bran mash or was it buns or cake or doughnuts or something. Keep your eyes open for me coming up the front walk sometime this summer or fall. I’ll probably wear the same rigout I’ve got on in my last picture, tunic and slacks as they call them. Maybe I’ll call you up on the phone to make sure you have friend spuds for supper. I never did get any over here that were like yours and I sure will be able to clean up on a plateful believe me.

Had a letter from Dad and Uma and Katie with yours yesterday. Katie evidently hadn’t heard about the case but Uma and Dad seemed to think I was perfectly right in going ahead as I have done. One thing sure, I’ll never stick with a wife who doesn’t want any babies. You have me sized up right and I guess life would be pretty lonesome for me without one or two kids to have all my own.

I don’t blame any girl for not wanting to love all her life on a blinking homestead but for a couple years or so I think a shack for two a jolly good place to live and Mollie thinks the same.

Mollie is writing to you now I believe. She is sure most anxious to meet you after what you said in one of your letters about her finding a friend in you. She has been trying to screw up courage to do it for a long time and has only succeeded today.

I’m still working in the office. Pretty good of me to hold down the job of a clerk for this many weeks and be giving satisfaction yet. I can’t say I enjoy office work but money is a necessity over here. £1.10.0 a week comes in jolly handy.

Well I gotta ring off now. I’ll write again soon.

Lots of love to the kiddies and you. Tell Will I’ll see him soon, that is in a year or so.

Your loving brother,

Jack

Address as per usual.

Folly Farm Cottages

Sulhamstead

w. Reading

March 13th/1919

My Dear Stella,

I feel horribly shy at writing to you, and don’t know what to put, only I do want to write. I was going to write to you a month ago, but just then that cross letter came from you to Jack and I thought I would wait until he heard again. And he was glad to get this last letter

[insert from Jack – Don’t let her kid you Stella]

Stella, and to know you weren’t sore any longer. He does think an awful lot of you, and so do I from just hearing about you, and we wouldn’t have been so happy if you had stayed sore. You were just a dear to say what you did about me in one of your letter, and when I come to Edmonton, I want to see you before anyone else. Mother read that letter too.

I don’t know why I fell in love with Johnnie. I know before I met him that he was married, so that was the last think that entered my head. I had only gone home for the weekend (this was at the end of last October) but I was run down and Mother made me stay longer. I met Jack one afternoon when he came in to mother to have his neck bandaged. Only for just a minute then, but that evening he and two other boys came in to play cards. After that Johnnie and I saw each other every day – I got more and more in love with him, and one evening it all came out! I shouldn’t have told him I know, but I couldn’t help it, and it was ages – well about six weeks after, that he told me he loved me. Stella, our love just came unasked for, as all real love does, and I do hope with all my heart that I shall keep Jack happy, and be able to make home the best place on earth for him – and the little Snyders!

Mother doesn’t believe in divorce really, but she says she won’t interfere with us at all. I think at first she expected it all to blow over and thought it was just infatuation – but since we last went home I think she knows better. Mother had flu and nursing her, I caught it too, and Johnnie had to look after us. He was a gem of a nurse, and I was a little tyrant, but however much I kept him running up and downstairs, he never uttered a grumble – I got to know a different side of him then, and oh I do love him Stella, and if I thought now that I had to give him up it would just break my heart.

Well he is waiting for this so I must stop – goodbye Stella – write to me won’t you? I’m longing to see you.

Yours with love,

Mollie

March 29th/19

Dear Stella.

Guess it’s about time you were getting some more news or otherwise from me.

I got your letter of March 4th a few days ago and was sure glad to get such a one. It wasn’t the length of it that counted but the breadth and height and width etc. if you get what I mean.

I’ll be going back to the hospital on Monday as my leave is up and maybe I can get a little more, another month or so. I’ve got a good job at the office and can go to work there whenever it suits one best. In my boss’s own words “whenever and as long as it is convenient for me”. I’ve got a good stand in with him and as I’ve been satisfactory in my job, it will be open for me whenever I can get another leave.

I’m down at Harvie’s for the week-end. Came down last night and will go to London again Sunday night. Mollie and I often come down for the week-end as it is much more comfortable here and home-like and not half as much expense as it would be knocking around London and living at Lyons Corner Houses. If you don’t know anything about the Piccadilly Corner House or the Strand ditto just ask any returned soldier.

I was at a party last weekend at Schroeters, given by Mollie’s sister Ruth and expect to have one ourselves in a week or two at the same places.

Glad you’d like to hear from Mollie so she wrote nearly three weeks ago. I expect you’ve got the letter by this time tho’. I don’t know what Bert will tell you of the family, he didn’t pass his opinion to be but just get this, they belong to some better than the ordinary run of English family’s and only by bad luck and no fault of their own did they come to have to earn their own living. When Mrs. Harvie was a girl her folks were down in the Who’s Who as landed Gentry and it was Mother’s Grandfather and her uncle that ran thru the big estate in Lancashire and left the following generation practically penniless. I don’t know whether you’re bored with all this or not but you’re getting it to show you this, in the way things are reckoned in England Mollie is, - well different. She’s no – Oh! Blow I don’t know how to say what I want to tell you. She’s a jolly lot too good for one and anyone of my class but I can’t make her see that and I guess I never will. Since I came here I’ve learned that there are English and English and they don’t all drop their H’s or stick them on here and there where they didn’t ought to be. That’s pretty good grammar for Mrs. Mason’s brightest pupil to use isn’t it.

Haven’t had a word from Evelyn for a couple of months and neither have you or Katie so I’ve been wondering if she may have cleared out entirely or not. It sure would simplify matters some if she would make herself scarce for a year or so. I could just sail through on wife desertion and everything would be fixed up.

I suppose Con Hardie was up to see you. I gave him your address and he said he’d go up. He left here before I had finally settled my mind so he’s seen Evelyn tho’ he doesn’t say anything about her.

Guess you don’t want me back any more than I want to get back. I’m not in a very great rush tho’ so Mollie can’t get over before fall and I’m not keen on sticking around without a sight of her any longer than I can help. I’ve got a dozen strings pulling me towards home but I guess the one holding me here is strongest than the dozen over there.

The reason for all those different letters arriving at your place Stella was because first of all I didn’t trust Evelyn and the least suspicion soon turned to belief and I determined to break. Also I found I couldn’t do without Mollie. A short time afterwards I got a couple of letters and a picture from Evelyn and began to wonder if I had made a mistake from one of the letters it seemed that she still thought a lot of me and I decided that the only square thing to do was to go back to her again. That was the time I tried to undo all the mischief my first letter made. Later I got one letter from Evelyn that completely finished things and I threw up the sponge and told her I was through. As soon as I made up my mind to go back to Evelyn I told Mollie so and we both had a rotten time for a few days. Later on I found that for several reasons I would never go back to Evelyn and since then Mollie and I have never spent an unhappy minute in each other’s company. We’ve never had words over anything and tho’ I was fed up on Hospitals and soldiering and everything except her and I was peevish and miserable one evening she was as good and patient with me as anyone could wish. She’s a jewel Stella, that any man would be proud of and she loves me with all her might and that’s some. I know you’ll like her, you couldn’t help it, because everyone does and her\_\_\_\_\_\_. You’ll see her yourself someday and know all I mean. She just right and couldn’t be better tho’ she has got a funny little nose.

Well Stella, seems this all Mollie but I don’t know anything better to talk about and I only hope you won’t be bored to death.

I guess you know a lit more than I told you in my letters but I know it will always be between us two and the world needn’t be any wiser. Mollie knows all about me good and bad and is going to have me anyhow so I guess love must be blind.

So long for now. I’ll write sooner next time I hope.

Your loving brother

Johnnie

Everyone calls me Johnnie here, that’s how I happened to put it down instead of Jack.

Folly Farm Cottages

Sulhamstead

Saturday, March 29th

My Dear Stella,

Johnnie says to put a note in, so here goes. I shared your last letter with him. It was a peach, and you are a dear to say the things you do! I will feel at home directly I see you. I’m glad you said you’d like to hear from me, especially as I have already written and you’ll have got the letter by now.

We’re at home for the weekend, and having a gorgeous time as usual, because no one minds how much we spoon here! Up in town we hardly get alone at all and I get so fed up with it at times that I want to kick everyone away – but it will be all over one day thank goodness.

Well, I’m cooking dinner and the meat wants basting and turning, so goodbye. I’m looking forward to hearing from you. With love to you and kisses to my future niece and nephews.

Mollie

Queens Hospital

Sidcup, Kent

April 9th, 1919

Dear Stella,

Time seems to fly so fast that I don’t have any to spare these days. Mollie and I are together every evening and it’s generally too late when I get in to write letters. However Mollie isn’t feeling well today and has gone home early. I just left her a few minutes ago and came straight up to this room to settle a few of my long delayed letters.

My pass was up a week ago Monday, the 31st of March and I went back to hospital and got another two months. That leaves me till May 31st and as we expect to cross in June I’ll not do so badly. You see my jaw bone is not healed enough to secure a perfect bone graft so they can’t operate till June anyhow and I might as well be on leave. I’m still working at the office and can get £1.10.0 every week I work and can stay away whenever I like so I’ve nothing to grumble about. I often quit Friday night and spend the weekend with Mollie and her Mother at their place near Reading. I’ll be there for Easter holidays and come back to the office during May. Mollie and I spend every ~~night~~ (pardon me), every evening together, sometimes at friends of hers and sometimes at Schroeters and the balance at Charmy’s club for soldiers and their lady friends. Somehow and anyhow we manage to be together every evening and we haven’t missed one since I got my leave on Jan. 31st and unless something strange happens we won’t miss any till my pass is up. She’s a dear girl Stella and I know you’ll like her because everyone does. She’s completely taken up with your letters and is looking forward to meeting you as soon as possible. She sure appreciates what you said about you and Will always being firm friends of hers and so do I. Stella, you can please me no better than by being as nice to Mollie as possible. I know after you have met her you’ll love her for her own sake instead of mine.

Last Saturday Mollie and I spent the p.m. boating at Richmond park. Of course tho’ it’s April we are having lovely weather here and Saturday was warm and sunny all day. We had tea at Richmond and then took a bus to Hammersmith and got Ruth and went back for some more boating. Altogether we spent a very pleasant day and incidentally about two pounds of good English paper money. It costs a deuce of a lot to live here now. Every time you turn around it’s a shilling or half-a-crown and believe me a pound just fades away into oblivion in about two shakes. However we manage pretty decently as I’m working and get Army pay in the bargain. So long as Mollie and I can keep alive we’re satisfied if we’re together and we would both sooner travel together on sixpence each every evening than meet once a week and have a blowout. Savvy.

Had a letter from Evelyn a few days ago. She wants to know what’s going to happen as I haven’t written since early in January. Guess I’ll answer it tonight. She says if everything is over she’ll just naturally disappear. Might help some if she did.

Mollie said to send her love to you and kiddies. The same thing from me. Guess I’ll see you again pretty soon now, Stella. August at the latest.

You should get this around about the time of your birthday. Many happy returns Stella. I’ll send something along next week to remember me by.

Give my best to Will. Hope to see you all again in a few months.

Always your loving brother,

Jack

Home

[no date]

Dear Stella,

I’m waiting patiently for your letter, and Johnnoe saod ‘don’t write till you get it’, but I’m just going to doiosobey him for once – Generally I have to do as I’m told!

Don’t you think Johnnie’s writing has improved since he started clerking? I think I’ll have to try the same myself as mine seems to get daily worse.

Well I’m cooking pastry and looking after the dinner, so I guess this is all for now – or the pastry will be burnt!

We’re more in love than ever! In fact everyone gets sick of the spooning so we’ve given it up in front of other people.

Goodbye for now –

Yours with love

Mollie

Hope I’ll have some of your renowned fried spuds one day – also the bran muffins or is it bran mash – (Johnnie made me put that last 3 words).

[first page missing – no date]

……… we do. But it’s the money that counts and at the end of March we will receive cheques for March accounts for approximately $1200.00 at least. And we have only scratched the outside of this military washing game. My objective at present is $500.00 a week in business and I expect we will reach that in a few months’ time.

I don’t know whether you are interested in all this or not but now I’ve spilled it you’ll have to read it anyhow.

As for news there isn’t any. Mollie and the kids are all well. There’s a temporary hold up in the Legacy business but not serious enough to cause any worry. Some lack of evidence of the death of the girls’ father and of course it has to be firmly established that he is dead otherwise he would inherit the money himself. However he is very dead and it only remains to convince the administrators to that effect to polish it off. In the meantime, their share is piling up at the rate of about $20.00 a week until it is settled.

Well old Dear, I am afraid I must cease this eternal scribble as I have promised myself a full evening of letter writing and I know you would not dream of being the cause of me not writing to anyone else.

Mollie sends her love and thanks you prettily for the letter etc. She will probably be writing some herself soon. However we can only afford one pen so we only write one at a time. This pen by the way is the one I got for poker hand cigarette cards in Edmonton.

Bye-bye for now and don’t forget that with all your-my-our faults I love you still. Of course I only suppose I would as I never remember seeing you still. Still I do love you still. Helluva silly word, still, isn’t it? Sounds a bit like moonshine or bootleg.

Love from

Johnnie.