

Glenbow Archives

M-6245-2b, Theodora Paynter McKay's First World War letters, 1918

14.2.18 [February 14, 1918]

Dear Sister

I was so glad to hear from you again & very sorry that we couldn't meet in the south of France. It would have been great. I am awfully fond of all that part of the country you went to. I was very surprised to hear that you had moved from Longuenesse & hope you are all settled in comfortably in the new place by now, what a pity we aren't a bit closer. I feel just like a good dance tonight – or any other night for that matter.

Will any of you be in London on leave during the first fortnight in March. If so please get whoever is there to wire me at 31 Fairfax Road, Bedford Park & we will fix up a dinner (if we can still get anything to eat) and a theatre (if they are still allowed) & a very surreptitious dance!

I hope you like your new CO, the old one seemed to be a very nice man. It was a pity he had to go.

The weather out here is simply marvelous day after day of brilliant sunshine – it really seems a different world to Flanders.

Well I must close down as the corporal is waiting to lay the cloth for dinner. Be sure to write & let me know how you get on.

With the very best of wishes,

Yours sincerely
R. M. Burman

14-4-18 [April 14, 1918]

Dear "Big Sister"

Just a line to hope that you are in the best of health and that No. 4 are still going strong and not yet prisoners. I didn't leave until Thursday and should like to withdraw anything I might have said about you people not doing any work. We were all ashamed of ourselves when we saw just how you did carry on.

Am having a great time trying to keep my eyes open and mouth shut. You can imagine how hard the latter is! The chaps on the Brigade seem to be a fine lot and the general is OK – made me

feel right at home. They are all looking forward to a trip to No. 4 in the dim and distant future (that is the junior members) and most of them can twinkle. Am sure the rest will soon be taught. How many pupils have you now by the way? I've only got my old batman to practice with and he's not strong on either fox-trots or twinkles.

Now cheerio for this time. Remember me to all the sisters, especially Miss Johnstone and the two pupils – Miss Cummings and Miss Lynch. Don't work too hard and don't think we're licked yet.

Yours sincerely

Howard C. Green

Address

6th Can. Inf. Bde H.Q.

7/5/18 [May 7, 1918]

Dear "Big Sister":-

I had begun to fear that my letter to you had gone astray, when one arrived from you two days ago. I guess you have had a pretty busy time the last month but things should be better from now on.

So you still have that extension ready. It's really very kind of you but of course I hope that I won't see it just yet awhile. Am not very keen on getting wounded here for the route to Blighty would not be near any Canadian hospitals and it's too soon yet anyway. I did not know that the bunch had moved until your letter came; they weren't very anxious to go I bet; you surely have stolen our happy home. Is the old gramophone still going strong or did they take it with them?

Had hoped to get down for tea and a lesson while we were out this time but it has been impossible so far. You should have seen all the rehearsals there have been too. Our French friends think we're crazy no doubt. The Veterinary Officer is quiet except at the "twinkle" and there are four or five others who are anxious to take lessons. I can't learn that waltz at all -- do you remember "No you won't quit - 1-2-3, 1-2-3"? Too bad the Major wouldn't give you any more Map Reading lessons. I had a fine bunch of maps done up to take down with me but they'll keep. Have Miss Cummings and Miss Lynch forgotten their lessons? Don't know about bringing the General down for that party -- am keeping at a respectful distance from him although he is a "peach". He is about the size of your OC and I think you'd all like him. Has only been with us two or three weeks. He was OC of the unit Miss McGill's brother belonged to.

We've had lots of rain lately and it has seriously interfered with baseball, football etc. so that we've had to resort to bridge for amusement. Had been congratulating myself on my luck until

last evening when I had dinner with one of the battalions and afterwards gave the party at bridge. Came home a poorer and a wiser man. It was the battalion Miss McGill is so interested in and they certainly know how to entertain.

That long-looked for letter arrived the other day and was quite up to expectations. My first never arrived. Am feeling very fickle.

Miss McGill's cousin was over the day before yesterday and we kept him for tea. He is going to go down to the C.C.S. with us if we ever get near you again. He is a very good scout officer. Found that he knows some of my people in B.C.

Hope this finds you all well. Remember me kindly to Miss Johnson, the M.R. class and the rest of the mess. What is the next lesson after the waltz?

Yours sincerely,

Howard C. Green

28.5.18 [May 28, 1918]

Dear Sister

I was so glad to get a letter from you yesterday -- it had been sent on from Italy and so dated 21.4.18. Pretty bad that -- wasn't it?

I came back to France about a month ago and am now at the Base waiting to be posted to a new job. As soon as I get something I hope to have an opportunity to come & look you up again.

We had a nasty raid here the other day and as you probably know one of your Base Hospitals caught it badly and some of the Sisters were hit. It was a disgraceful thing that, in a place like this -- there was nowhere for them to go.

I like the idea of the gramophone, piano and good floor -- we really must fix up another dance sometime or other. Have you had many changes in the staff since we met at Longuenasse or are you much about the same?

I am having a most idle time of it down here & amuse myself by playing golf all day. It is very nice for a bit and almost like being on leave -- but I hope it won't last too long.

There are quite a number of Americans about now, aren't there? One sees them all over the place. I like them all very much. They are so cheery and enthusiastic. I am afraid that our enthusiasm has worn a bit threadbare after four years of this sort of thing so a tonic of that sort won't do us any harm.

Write me a line if you have time and let me [know] exactly where I can find the C.C.S. then if I get a chance I will drop in -- I should awfully like to see you all again.

Yours sincerely,

R. M. Burman

29.6.18 [June 29, 1918]

Dear Sister

Thank you so much for your letter which arrived the day before yesterday after wandering all over France for more than three weeks after me.

We are in England now -- for three weeks -- there was none left in the whole Division after the last show so they filled up the Staffs and sent us off to England to see if we could find any men anywhere about. It is an extraordinary war isn't it?

Now that I am in England there cannot be any harm in your writing the name of the place where your mess C.C.S. is, so that I shall be able to keep a lookout for it when we come out again. I haven't heard yet how they all got on in Italy but as far as I can gather the 7th Division must have been in Reserve at the time of the attack & the other two Divisions stopped the Ostrich so easily that the 7th were never called on. However, I expect they came in for their share in the latter part of the show.

I got a letter from one of the doctors at the Liverpool Merchants' Hospital which was at Etaples when I was there and he tells me that they had such a bad time of it with the bombing after I left that all the hospitals cleared out and the M.O.'s and Sisters are all in England now waiting until the huts have been re-erected in a new place. I hope they didn't get any more Sisters during the latter raids.

Captain Dubs is in the same Division that I am with now -- the last time we met was at Madame's chateau at Longuenesse during the first dance.

Please write again when you have time & remember me to all old friends.

Yours sincerely

R. M. Burman
HQ
7th Infantry Brigade
USA Camp Group
Marlborough P.O.
Fairborough

5-8-18 [August 5, 1918]

My Dear "Big Sister"

Just a line to hope that you are well and happy although I'm pretty sure you will be both.

Got back safely early the next morning. Found a lorry after I left you, travelled to the next town, stopped off for dinner and then bummed a train ride. Unfortunately, I overslept and was carried several miles past the right station so had to spend the rest of the night in a coach. It was quite OK though and then I got right to the home door by breakfast time. One can go a long way in this country as long as the five franc notes hold out. Mine just came out right for I landed in with 1 ½ d - three ha'pennies isn't it they call it?

Had a fine home too. It was in a large chateau not much knocked about for the Owners were there -- an old lady and gentleman. Madame was very quaint and spoke "ze very good Henglish". She loaned us her tennis court, racquets etc. so you may know what a favourite that was.

Everything is fine and I only hope it is the same with you. Getting back to the simple life is a treat in some ways. Remember me kindly to "la petite soeur", Miss Johnstone, Cummings and Lynch and the rest of the family. Hope you are all comfortable.

Now cheerio big sister mine. Despite the "more or less" stuff you sure are alright.

Sincerely

Howard C. Green

14.8.18 [August 14, 1918]

Dear Big Sister

Just a line to let you know that we are still OK and to hope that everybody in No. 4 is well and in good spirits. I guess you are all working pretty hard now. Haven't the least idea where you are.

It has been a great show hasn't it? Poor old heine (?) did some quick moving the first few days and it kept everybody busy trying to keep up with him. My part in the show was very unimportant but it was fine just to be in it. Capt. Sharpe, my very bashful boss did great work and has been recommended for the M.C. He is a fearless beggar. "Little" sister's small cousin did fine work too. He is still going strong. All the chaps who went down to your place with me came through safely. Gainor was sent to England before the show to be an instructor at Bex Hill. The Adjutant of that Battalion you visited did fine work. The Captain, who danced the last dance with Miss West (ask her) got wounded in the throat.

This is a great day. Am sitting on a harrow in the front yard of a somewhat damaged chateau but it is quite a good home now - fritz is so many miles away.

Haven't got any good souvenirs yet -- am afraid I'm not a good Canadian. They are fierce -- go through everything that looks as if it might have a souvenir in it. All the men have been smoking Hun cigars lately and about half of them wear Hun caps. The loot was of all kinds -- from honey to pianos. My battalion have a cow.

Now Big Sister -- it's getting warm out here so I'll close. Remember me kindly to the class, Miss Johnson and the rest of No. 4.

Yours sincerely,

Howard Green

30-8-18 [August 30, 1918]

Dear Big Sister:-

Your letter arrived safely and it was very good of you to write. We all passed near your home to the wood away beyond the town the day you saw Capt Sharpe but there was no chance to look you up. Next day we left for our present location. Am hoping that you have moved near us and shall try to find out sometime today, but it will probably be impossible to get over.

Too bad those three sisters left. Your little family circle will be very much changed by winter time, won't it? Don't you go and get moved to the base! I'm looking forward to quite a pleasant winter and some more "lessons". We are out of this second show for the time being anyway and it sure was a dandy. This old Brigade came out with flying colors and very light casualties -- easily the best in the division. In other words, "certainly we are the people!" The battalions are splendid. I am more thankful every day that I was sent to this Brigade. None of my very good friends got hit this time -- at least not killed and that is what counts for a man with a "Blighty" is OK. Poor old heine did quite a "hump" the first day and it sure helps out one's morale. Capt. Sharpe and "the" Brigade major again did great work -- also "Little Sister's" cousin. He came out OK but Wilson, who worked with him and who was with the party that time we had tea and a dance, was wounded for the third time.

This place is like home to us for you know where we were while the rest of the bunch were living on the fat of the land. I really think the Division have done better than they would have had they had a long rest. That Battalion you dined with had put several very good raids over on Neuville, Vitasse and they "sneaked" the place this time before the show started. Edgar, their signalling officer, who was at that party (brought in the Doullens bunch) was badly wounded; also Bannan, to whom you were talking just after you arrived (I don't suppose you remember for there were quite a few there, weren't there?)

It is fine back where we are now -- the morale is going up by leaps and bounds and we're good for a whole lot yet. Had a "dip" in the "river" (???) this morning.

The old Froggies are working away in the fields gathering in their grain. They planted it this spring, (I guess that should be "sowed" -- we're from B.C. you know) then the big push came and the fields were under observation and fire; trenches were dug through them and wire put up, but now, inside four days, they're all at work getting in what's left of the crop.

Am expecting leave in about two weeks but am afraid I shall find it difficult to put in the time. I suppose you will not be in Blighty about then for if you were it would only be right to escort "big sister" to a show sometime, wouldn't it?

Now there is no more news so I'd better close.

Capt Sharpe is away for the day but I'm sure he'd like to be remembered to you all. Remember me kindly to "petite soeur" Miss Johnstone, Miss Cummings and the rest and I hope this finds you all happy.

Yours sincerely

Howard C. Green

P.S. Please excuse this paper -- it's been in some "surplus kit". H.C.G.

19-10-18 [October 19, 1918]

Dear Ted:-

Just a line to hope that you and all the friends at No. 4 are well and that you haven't been shifted. We hear rumors of the hospital having moved but they are very indefinite.

Had quite a good time on leave although I was foolish enough to have trench fever most of the first week. London is a fierce place now - money every time you turn round and every hotel packed. I saw several shows but they didn't seem to be quite as good as the ones last spring. Sister Alexander went on transport duty the day I got over, I didn't see her. There were lots of little excitements but I shall tell you some day. It's much easier than writing. By the way, we have a Ford car now and it has tremendous possibilities.

Saw the school going over and coming back. They have a very "bon" spot and are carrying on with the good work. "Birdie" they say, spends all his time writing letters. "Pay" is still going strong and was hoping to get up to see you all some day.

Got back the day before this show and didn't have a chance to see you on the way up. We've been very busy ever since things started to move. Just now it is doubly interesting because the

S.C.I. is away on leave. The hun isn't losing much time these days is he? It means lots of walking and sometimes things get mixed up but one's "morale" goes away up during these advances. The place we're in now was in No Man's Land 36 hours ago and now it's "an 'ome from 'ome" -- beds, tables, mirrors, side-boards, stoves and even china.

Tell "Little Sister" I saw her cousin a lot yesterday and he is OK. His MC for Amiens didn't come through but he surely deserved it.

We have a new General -- the other one was wounded; Maj. Grosvenor is away on leave and then gets promoted, so everything is new. Still the "Dro- - - Brigade" though. (My we are humble).

Cheerio. Remember me kindly to the others.

Howard Green

(Plain to be seen I'm the night duty) How are the dances going? Still lots of people for tea I guess -- you should charge two bits a head -- there would be just as big a crowd and you'd all be able to retire "après la guerre". Have you had any riding lately? The area you are in must be pretty well deserted now.

Poor Fitzroy was killed they say. A lot of fellows got it in that show. After all the war can't end much too soon can it although I don't think he's had thrashing enough yet.

Now cheerio again. Remember me to Miss Johnstone and Miss M. Gilland, Miss Cummings particularly.

H.C.G.

Belgium, 20.11.18 [November 20, 1918]

My dear Miss Paynter.

A line to say that we are on our way to the Rhine, and not far from Namur. It is a glorious march, and we are everywhere having a warm reception.

I trust you have cleared all those sick cases by now, and are close upon our heels.

Sincerely
Willard Treleven

Germany, Dec. 9 / 1918.

My Dear Paynter.

We are only 18 kilometres from our destination tonight and expect to reach Bonn tomorrow night.

I wish that your unit was coming up to this place, for I fear the winter will be cold and bleak amongst these frigid people, alone.

Sincerely
Willard T.

801 Boyd Building
Winnipeg
December 6th /18.

Dear Sister Paynter :-

In sending you my best wishes for a Merry Xmas and for all possible joys in the coming war free year, I bet you will accept as a memento of the days we both spent with No. 4 C.C.C.S. [Canadian Casualty Clearing Station] the trinket I am forwarding under separate cover.

The brooch is the (unofficial) badge we adopted for the unit, embodied in which is the Crest of the Units God-parent - Manitoba Medical College. The metal of which the brooch is made is from a piece of the bell of Ypres Cathedral which I was fortunate enough to get hold of while in the neighborhood of the celebrated Salient.

Not being a noble metal I am afraid it cannot be worn on cotton or linen without discoloring the fabric. I am in hopes nevertheless, that in years to come it may not be entirely devoid of some slight sentimental value.

With kindest regards, believe me
Yours sincerely
E.W. Prowse

Winnipeg, Manitoba
15.12.18 [December 15, 1918]

Dear Miss Paynter:

A wee card from one of three -- a Sgt; a Cpl; and a Pte. plus two pr. of gloves rec'd there
discharge from H.M.S. and are now plugging hard. Love to all the Op. Room Staff;
Congratulations to Matron Johnson.

May the boys and girls soon come home. The three already here are anxious to have a good tutor
in Op. Theatre technique.

Cheerio,
G. Cunningham