

Transcription

Copy of letter by George Francis Murphy from France on 19 October 1916

19.10.16

Dear Girlie/

I'm starting a letter to you right up in the front. Just like old times, up north is it not? My word it is cold here. I had the lads pulled out for a rest, for a few days, and of course the moment we came in it began to rain again. Prior to that we had two heavy frosts and yesterday it snowed. I'm wearing two pairs of sox and I don't know how many shirts and sheepskins, I have on.

This dugout is very different to the one with the stove and the stained glass window. It is the usual German type, about 16 to 20 ft underground. Shells rock down on it, but so far, none have got in here. The ground for hundreds of yards round is like a piece of enlarged crochet work, - pitted with shell holes.

I wrote to London for warm clothing two days ago – won't I be glad when they come.

I fancy I wrote you we have another Padre, now, CR [?] – Capt Higgins – he has some very funny yarns about soldiers' letters.

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A woman writes to Pay Office, - "I am going to be confined, what are you going to do about it," and another, "You have changed my girl into a boy, will it matter?" –

The Col. is now a full colonel and is still away. I do not think he will come back to a Bn again. Too good a man. I am growing a "Mo" again; it has reached the stage when boy wd say "Poor Daddy, Mother will wash it for you." Wish I could see him again soon. Jack Paul was recommended for a Bn a few days ago. I hope he gets one soon. I fully expect mine any day now and am keeping clear of shells &c, so as to be on the spot.

I went thr. my diary again and cannot for the life of me find out what that parcel contains unless it is postcards. Why do they stop them at the Central Office? – Here goes for another sleep for 10 min./

20/11/16

Well, I didn't get much of that sleep. The weather has been fine, but tonight promises to be cold again.

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I will send you entries to make in the Autograph album. There are very few of those who signed left. Col. Lamrock is back in Aust. I – [?] and Marcus were killed on Anzac, Connors over here. All the officers of my Coy are still alive. I fancy it is the only Coy which has that record. [I?E] Coy has lost two. Poor Fergusson went first, then Rush. As poor Rush said it to me on the Berrima as we watched South Head disappear, "It's all in the game." He had rotten luck poor kid.

Tomorrow I hope to get a real good sleep, and a shave not to mention a wash. We do look pictures I can tell you. – I'm sure Boy wouldn't recognise me. I'm an awful looking ruffian after a few unwashed unshaven days, - just the 'ideal tramp' who used Pear's soap 20 years ago.

Do you know you have a better chance of letter writing than I have. You see, we seldom know till the last moment, when the mail goes and we cannot write about the things we are living, what else can we do but ask questions? And the answers cannot reach us under 3 ½ mths. Did you ever receive 3 Belgian coins from London, sent about 16th June?

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Do you know what the sigs call me? Emma Emma – the sigs way of saying M. M. Sounds very endearing does it not? I had an interesting conversation with two prisoners last night. I spoke in English and they in German. One beautiful liar told me in German, that he could not speak English, but that was in reply to a query as to whether he could. It was very dark & muddy so I cut the yarn short and sent them on.

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Do you know – those pictures of the villages in the Town & Country & Mail are very realistic. I wish they would let us use a camera here. Mine is in London with Cooks. I hope to get leave again in January or February. – Fancy I'll get to Ireland and Scotland then, the Scotch Girls are very nice, and Edinburgh is a beautiful city. I'll never forget the view of Princes St in the grey lights of October. The Thames at Westminster is beautiful, but it does not even rival this other. The lack of refreshment rooms amazed me on long train journeys. At York there is a buffet, at which soldiers & sailors only are served with tea – a gallon almost for 1 d.

23/11/16

Thank the Lord - we are able to get a rest now. Did you ever feel utterly weary of everything – I don't think I ever felt [?] utter collapse

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as I did 36 hrs ago, when I came out, and tramped for 4 hours in mud nearly knee deep, tangles of barbed wire, shell holes every foot, and a dense fog which hid objects even 5 yds away. Only the sight of a wounded man who needed my help, and some 100 men who had lost their way and were weary unto death, kept me on my feet. We got back, and sank down on wet, muddy ground, too exhausted to mind the occasional shell which fell into our camp, and claimed a few victims. – But next day, we raised a faint song, and got back something like a town, and now we will be O.K. – No letters to hand from you today, but 10 bags come tomorrow, so I'm hoping for luck then. I saw my photo in the

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Sydney Mail today (16/9/16). Fancy I'll have it taken again; see if I cannot improve on the Cairo effort.

Well, Girlie, I'll finish this doleful off now & get a sleep.

Good Bye for a day or so.

Your loving

Geo