

Don Duncan

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DON
(Victoria Park, Truro, April, 1943)

Some Letters and Other Writings

of

DONALD ALBERT DUNCAN



*Greater love hath no man than this.
That a man lay down his life for his friends.
St. John*

1945
THE IMPERIAL PUBLISHING COMPANY LIMITED
Halifax, N. S.

The story is not enough I know, but what of that. It will surely seem enough to you, since your son wrote it . . .

Saroyan's "The Human Comedy"

*For Donald's
MOTHER*

*She riseth while it is yet night . . . with
the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.
She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly
with her hands.
She is not afraid of the snow, for all her household
are clothed with scarlet . . .
She stretcheth out her hands to the poor; yea,
she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
She looketh well to the ways of her household,
and eateth not the bread of idleness.
Strength and honour are her clothing,
and she shall rejoice in time to come . . .
Let her own works praise her in the gates.*

Proverbs

Many times you will laugh and many times you will weep, but always you will laugh and weep together. You will never have a moment of time in your life to be mean and petty or small. Those things will be beneath you—too small for the swiftness of your spirit—too insignificant to come into the line of your vision.—

“The Human Comedy.”

Sandy Hook, Man.

June 4th, 1936

Dear Jim:

Before commencing this epistle I should like to warn you that if you are tired, busy, discouraged, or annoyed, postpone the reading of said epistle, or drop it into the waste basket, because it will either annoy, anger, or disgust you due to its undeniably shallow contents. However if you are in a benign and indulgent humor, you may read on without hesitation since it will be harmless and urbane.

I suggest that you read it in bed before retiring, since I guarantee it to have a decidedly soporific effect on anyone so partial to slumber as yourself.

Poetry they say (one 1% “wit” probably said it once), is the art of saying nothing in an admirable manner. Letter writing, I should venture to suggest, is the art of saying nothing in an entertaining manner, (do not quote me on this, since it is merely a suggestion proffered in all humility).

On reading the contents of my letter thus far, I have lived up to the first part of my definition, that of saying “nothing;” I have not, I am convinced, said anything in an “entertaining” manner. If you have read this far you will no doubt agree with me, and now since we are both in accord as to the utter worthlessness of this letter, I see no point in continuing. However since I have habituated myself to doing things with no point in them, I shall continue.

Having now like Polonius “multiplied words indefinitely” I shall endeavor to confine myself to facts—but facts, according to Sellers “Logic,” either explain a theory or are explained by one, so I shall find this self-imposed task rather difficult.

I have spent the last few days vegetating at the lake, eating (sparsely to be sure), sleeping, reading, talking to and smoking at Messrs Bob Swan, Wynne Campbell, Don Best and George Baldry and being talked to and smoked at by the same Messrs. S., C., B. and B. Incidentally each of the aforementioned is batching it alone, like myself, at his respective cottage.

Having burdened you with an excess of trivialities I shall now divest myself of some weightier observations.

The “Ghost Goes West” with Robert Donat, if you have not seen it, is very entertaining and Donat’s voice and English are a treat to hear.

“The Old Curiosity Shop” by Dickens is a quiet sentimental story, to be read on a full stomach, in an easy chair by an open fire, pipe in mouth.

My pass west is made out to Vancouver. I may take a trip there before returning to Banff and commencing the humiliating duties of guarding the expensive tools, with which corpulent American millionaires, to the accompaniment of American profanities and American grimaces, vainly attempt to bat along an innocent ball to its final subterranean destination, in as few slashes and hacks as possible.

As it is traditional and conventional to say in a letter of this nature that the writer is fine, the family are fine and the writer hopes you are also, I do so in all sincerity.

Before closing, I must confess to a certain childish levity and whimsicality in the composition of this humble epistle. Therefore in closing I should like to make one serious recommendation. Jim, I earnestly beseech you to preserve this and any other communications you may receive from me for the benefit of posterity.

Why? You ask. Because since I intend to immortalize my stupidity some day by writing a book, some poor antiquarian will probably unearth this humble document and prove by the date at the top that the renowned novelist Rupert Cholmondoley (my pen name pronounced “Chumly”) to the consternation of all the other poor antiquarians, must have been 51 when he died and not 53 as formerly universally believed.

With a cordial handshake then, and a fraternal blessing I remain,

Your

Adolescently asinine,

Brother,

Don.

P.S.—On reading over this mess, I note with disfavor one or two sentences, that savour of Dickens, not of his brighter, catchy style but of his ponderous lapses. (Subconscious influence of “O.C. Shop”).

Second P.S.—Congratulations on your birthday to come. I had intended sending you some little token of my feelings on that occasion, such as a

complete set of Shakespeare or a tennis racquet, but looking more carefully into my financial conditions I find my net worth to be \$1.15, which sum at June 4th, 1936, is I wager not 50 cents more than it was on June 4th, 1935, or June 4th, 1934. However like Micawber I “expect something to be turning up any day now, any day” and I am, in short, not at all bothered by the absence of pecuniary emoluments.

Third P.S.—I have not changed character or temperament since you left

- (1) I still annoy Angela about small matters like desserts.
- (2) I still look and think like a corpse on arising.
- (3) I still forget telephone messages.
- (4) I still grin insipidly.
- (5) I still remonstrate with Mother as to what food stuff is “good” and what is not.
- (6) I still write and spell badly.

D. A. D.

Banff, Alberta
June 21st, 1936

Dear Mother:

I could borrow only one sheet of paper which Alan Adamson pinched from the hotel. Consequently this will be as the last, a very short letter. I received your respective letters which I enjoyed very much. I always enjoy receiving a letter from home no matter what it contains, because one always gets a thrill seeing a letter for oneself under the “D’s” on the letterboard. I have only been here for nine days but it seems a month, I have enjoyed it so much. We have not been very busy caddying as yet, but usually manage to get a round once a day, and some of the boys are lucky enough to get two. I hope you don’t expect me to come home with any “pot of gold”, but I do intend to save enough to buy all my books for next year and a few articles of clothing. One lives a very healthy life up here, rising generally about 7.15 or 7.30 and eating three “squares” a day. We do a lot of beefing among ourselves about the food, but we always pack away a pretty hearty meal. If we happen to come in late in the evening we get a meal ticket which entitles us to eat upstairs in the officers’ dining room where we get coffee that can easily be distinguished from tea or hot water.

I am convinced that caddying is the most enjoyable work up here. We are always out-doors and get lots of sun, what’s more we have all kinds of spare time, and can play lots of tennis. We start water polo Wednesday and

thenceforth I will get three free swims a week. I have not been riding yet but intend to go shortly. It costs 50 cents an hour for caddies and staff and \$1.50 for guests. Staff get everything at a lower rate.

I am now about to make a request which you can consider and fulfil or not according to the solvency of the family budget. The tennis racket Aunt Vern lent me is rapidly coming apart, the gut is loose and very rotten and it won't last another week, and I don't want to use it much now and completely ruin it. Consequently I shall soon be "sans racket." I have made and hung onto some money but I would hate to throw it away buying a racket, since if I don't start saving something now I never will. I would suggest that you look around and see if you could find some good racket at a reasonable price. If you buy one and send it up I will repay you in part or in all when I return. Since tennis is my prime recreation I shall be lost until I have a racket. If you can get one, my weight is 13½ oz. and I would suggest some racket made by Slazenger if possible. Don't get a cheap one which would not last the summer, nor an overly expensive one; probably from 5 to 6 dollars. I will not be disappointed if you cannot afford it, but will hang on to the dollars until I can get one, however, let me know soon.

Tell Marion I will write her some day when I feel like wasting paper, but if a letter does not come through shortly, it is no excuse for her not writing me.

If you see any of the boys tell them I am having a great time and will write anon.

I remain,

Your sunburnt son
Don.

Banff, Alberta
June 29th, 1936

Dear Jim,

You have probably read the few letters I have written home and are therefore more or less aware of how I am quartered and what I am doing up here. Since I last wrote home several new caddies have arrived and there are about a dozen of us now besides the mob of local kids from Banff who are always a terrible nuisance down at the golf course. The caddies have come from all over Canada so far, three of them are my age and the rest a year or two younger. There is a boy from New York who has just been appointed

Assistant Caddy Master at \$45.00 a month (a fine case of suckholing, which I do not go in for but which is very profitable up here). Another from Moose Jaw, one from Vancouver, one from Guelph, Ont., a little English boy, who is very decent. From Winnipeg there are up to date, myself, Alan Adamson, Bill Matheson, several of the elevator boys. Jack Richardson and Bill Poole arrived last night. We all get along very well together and have got to know each other very well in such a short time.

Alan Adamson has a great sense of humour and makes an excellent room-mate. He keeps a journal where he records, among other things, his impressions of the various people he caddies for—something I ought to do if I had the industry; he is a smart kid and must have come very close to a scholarship last year with an average of 85. I have missed breakfast for the last four successive mornings, and am getting used to it. I have lost no business that way, however, since one seldom gets out 'till about 10 or so unless one has an engagement or one's number is near the first of the list.

I don't know any place in Canada where one could spend a pleasanter summer than here at Banff. The scenic effects are sometimes almost staggering in their beauty, and the golf course is virtually a Garden of Eden. We are planning on climbing Mt. Sulfur some evening and staying there for the sunrise.

If you get any breaks up here you can get a hold of quite a roll, and some of the chaps have had excellent breaks. You can spend as fast as you earn however, and you just have to salt it away while you have it.

I would appreciate a letter some time, and hope you have a splendid holiday at the beach. I will write again and next time will try to be less informative and more imaginative.

Sincerely,
Don

Banff, Alberta
July 12th, 1936

Dear Family—

Received pants and \$2. bill, both of which were appreciated, especially the latter, which provided a very agreeable surprise. This has been rather a momentous day up here; Gene Sarazen and Helen Hicks played an exhibition game over the Banff Springs Course against two guests at the hotel. I was a for-caddy—that is, one who stands ahead of the play and

marks any balls that go into the rough, with a white flag. There was a huge gallery, ropes, officials, pomp, etc. Sarazen plays beautiful golf, but was weak on the green. He thinks the Banff course is one of the finest and most beautifully designed courses he has ever played over.

I know there were a lot of things I wanted to mention in this letter, but I probably won't think of them till I have it all sealed up. I received Jim's letter and am glad he had a fine holiday, also received a card from Don Best on the Geological survey. I will quote one excerpt from his note, trusting that you will not read it out to all the relatives, etc.—speaking of the nuisance of the flies, mosquitoes, etc., he says “they also make it rather difficult to perform Nature's necessary functions, biting the vital spots as soon as laid bare.”

I addressed this letter to Marion, so I had better talk to her for a while. I just remembered a day or two ago, Marion, that I was supposed to send back the racket—I forgot all about it last pay day and I suppose now that you'll be up here in 2 or 3 weeks, it's not worth while—you can borrow one for a while and I'll keep this one for you to use up here since it's only good for about a week's tennis. As a penalty for my forgetfulness I enclose two bits.

I might suggest, Mother, that when you do come up, you bring a little home-cooking along in the form of cookies etc. I have little kick against the meals in general, although there are some vague dishes served up which have a decidedly revolting and ambiguous character.

I seem to have exhausted both myself and my information so I'll leave you all to your respective businesses and pleasures, and trust you will write again to

Your sincere progeny and kinsman,
Don

Banff, Alberta
27 July, 1936

Dear Dorothy,

Life up here is very pleasant although lately I have had to be on the job pretty regularly since we have been rather busy. The hotel is doing the best they have done since '29—perhaps better. You have no doubt read most of my letters home, so I won't plague you with information as to my “doings.” There have been more and more caddies coming in ever since the 1st of July and there are about 30 of us now plus the kids from the town.

There are a very decent bunch of lads up here. We spend our evenings in various ways—tennis; reading; (I have been doing quite a lot of reading lately); talking—we get some great conversations up here—some frivolous, but often we settle down to an evening of serious intellectual conversation; swimming, going up town; etc. The staff annex is like a hotel in itself, being a building of considerable size, and there are often some rare parties going on—I am however leading a very quiet and temperate life.

Believe it or not, I have started reading the Bible quite a lot, and talk a lot about religion with a Roman Catholic from Winnipeg. I intend studying that religion when I come home to see if there is anything in it.

Having caddied for dozens of Americans from almost every state in the union, I have come to some definite conclusions about American golfers in general, and those from New York in particular.

(Barring many who are very decent, and intelligent.)

1. They worship the almighty dollar.
2. While playing golf they can think and talk of nothing but golf and business.
3. They are usually quite illiterate.
4. They are rotten golfers and take their golf very seriously.
5. They are supreme optimists about golf—they are always going to break a 100—and end up breaking a club.
6. Their stances and swings are absolutely beyond description.
7. 75% of them cheat at golf—they are only cheating themselves by the following methods.
 - a. Not counting all their strokes.
 - b. Moving their ball to a better tee.
 - c. Driving two balls and playing the best.

The caddy knows all, sees all and keeps his humble mouth shut.

I have formed another conviction—WOMEN should not be allowed to play golf.

Dot, I am getting tired of writing, so I think I'll dip into a novel I just got uptown—so I'll—no, wait a minute, how's the old crab getting along? Give him my best regards.

If you feel ambitious, you might write another much appreciated letter

to

Your scatter-brained,
Affectionate,
Brother,
Don

Banff, Alberta
July 29th, 1936

Dear Dad, Mother and “Rabbit,”

Acting on your suggestion, I reserved the room for a week, starting Aug. 8—I think it will be satisfactory. Incidentally, after eating in the beanery as long as I have, I thought I’d lived down that derogatory title of “fussfeathers.” However, don’t think that I can be conditioned to unsavoury food; I’ll probably be even harder to please when I get home. Mother, as I mentioned before, you might bring along a little home cooking—Alan and I have tremendous appetites up here.

Dad asked me if I get any tips—the average tip is 25 cents, but they range from nothing to a dollar or two (very seldom, almost never). Among the caddies however, tips are no sooner in the pocket than out again in circulation. However I do save a substantial portion of my pay-checks, and intend to buy a lot of books when I return.

Wrote Dorothy the other day, mailed it in the morning and received her justly petulant note. Dad, please send me some stamps next time you write—they are an item one can’t charge at the barber shop and store. The \$3.33 [Don’s share from sale of an ancient Ford car] will be deposited as suggested—Does Veysey know of the sale? He might not be pleased—it satisfies me—may its soul rest in peace.

I came across in the Bible “It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”—Dad, you and I ought to get in rather easily!

My next letter will be to Jim—I have only written him once—will write again when the spirit moves and the body is willing.

Adieu, Au revoir or so long
Sincerely, Don

N. B. Enclosed 25c. Marion—that does *not* mean I’m floating in money.

On Board S.S. "Montclare", June 8th, 1937

Dear Folks,

Thanks very much for your kind telegram, [congratulating Don on winning a scholarship] which was very cheering. It is a little difficult writing to-day since there is a bit of a sea and the table keeps rising and falling like the stomach of the stout woman sleeping near me on the lounge.

The 3rd Class on the Montclare is a genuine "Mitteleuropa"—English, Canadians, Americans, French, Germans, Swiss, and even Finns. "My" cabin has six bunks, 4 of which are occupied.

1. Myself.
2. Brian Carter—an English lad of 19, who worked at Banff last summer and roomed opposite me—rather a coincidence.
3. An almost inarticulate German Swiss whose snoring is only surpassed by the smell of his dirty socks.
4. Herbert Windish—a German musical instrument expert—worked in Kansas City for 9 years—returning to his home town to work for his father—manufacture violins, etc.

Herbert and I get along very well together—he is a fiend for rummy and chess—has invited me to visit him for a few days in his home town in Saxony. Social life aboard is very limited—more or less the stragglers from the "Duchess of Bedford" which left on the 4th. The weather has been lousy—4 days of impenetrable mist and now clouds and a rolling sea—however I have not yet missed a meal.

Well, the motion of the boat is not conducive to eloquence—I think I could make Mother sea-sick just telling her about the queer gyrations this room is undergoing—I may add a few words before we dock at Southampton.

P.S. Two decent young Icelanders aboard, who are crossing to join the Royal Air Force, sit at our table. They thought the steward was showing them the toilet when he ushered them into their cabin. They are both about 6 ft. 200 lbs.—it is very snug. Only girl at our table—English—graduate of Oxford in Eng.Lit.—reserved—well-spoken—mousy.



VOYAGE TO ENGLAND, JUNE, 1937



VOYAGE TO ENGLAND, JUNE, 1937

Sat., June 12th, 1937

Well, we have had the sun for a couple of days—very cheering—we shall be a day late at Southampton—arrive Monday morning—bad weather. Two-thirds of the ship were sick Friday—quite a sea. I felt a little insecure but stayed away from lunch and was all right. One gentleman was telling some of the boys in the saloon he had sailed for 10 years and never been sick, walked up on deck and in about 5 minutes let it go—then proceeded to declare in the dining room that he'd never seen such a sea in 40 years.

I should like to write pages about an eccentric old Irishman on board. I have talked to him for hours (at least I have been talked at). He told me at great length (sometimes the same story twice, he is rather forgetful) why Great Britain was responsible for the World War, why Dr. Jackson, the Roman Meal King (a friend of his) is the greatest man since Jesus Christ, how he has never encountered in 20 years of sea travel in every ocean, such abominable cooking and service.

The English girl I spoke of has had two meals in the last three days. I dislike the organized snobbery and class distinction which is maintained not by the cabin guests but by the authoritative little stewards and officers—concert last night—very stuffy—the humorous acts and chairman's jokes were mouldy with age.

Well, I shall soon see Havre, France, then 8 hours to Southampton, where my eccentric old Irish friend will proceed to the steamship office (where he has high connections—he claims) and lodge his complaints. I shall write again from London.

Yours sincerely

Don

London, Eng.

June 17th, 1937

Dear Jim,

This will not be a “voluminous” letter because I have only $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour to spare before supper, after which Vim [Don's Aunt, Mrs. J. R. Livingstone] and I are going to hear Richard Tauber in a light opera.

I got into London Monday and have been to the theatre every night, including tonight. Joe [Mr. Livingstone] has a cinema pass for two and can usually secure excellent seats for the legitimate stage as well. Last night we saw “Satyr” a new play by Paul Leslie, somewhat on the motif of Ibsen's

“Ghosts”—very gripping. Wednesday we saw the light opera of Offenbach, “The Grand Duchess”—splendid music and extraordinarily good wit—you must see the cinema “Love with a Stranger”—Basil Rathbone is unbelievably good as a mentally diseased criminal—wonderful study.

During the day I have been “doing” London by myself—Westminster, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Zoological Gardens, Hyde Park—(heard an orator prophesying the socialism of Jesus Christ), London Bridge, Mme. Toussad’s, Buckingham and the changing of the guard (to-day), etc., the usual tourist stuff ad infinitum but it’s good fun.

Joe and Vim have been wonderful—lovely room to myself and excellent meals—little Jean is charming and has a delightful accent.

I plan to take to the road on Monday—Joe and I are going out to Cambridge on Sunday—we will be away all day. I got my first sight of rural England from the train from Southampton to London—like looking at a series of beautiful post cards. Residential London is amazing—not a home without a carefully planned and cultivated garden—Joe’s is typical. The tube system in London is amazingly efficient—I have travelled around London by tube, tram, bus and electric railway respectively.

Enclosed a picture snapped in Trafalgar Square—myself and the two Icelandic lads who are entering the R.A.F.

Au revoir

Don

P.S. London is always drinking tea—Englishmen are just as reserved as they are made out to be.

I am anxious to hear how Dorothy is getting along—tell someone to write if no one has as yet written—I will write her soon—give her my best wishes.

Don

Canterbury, 23rd June, 1937

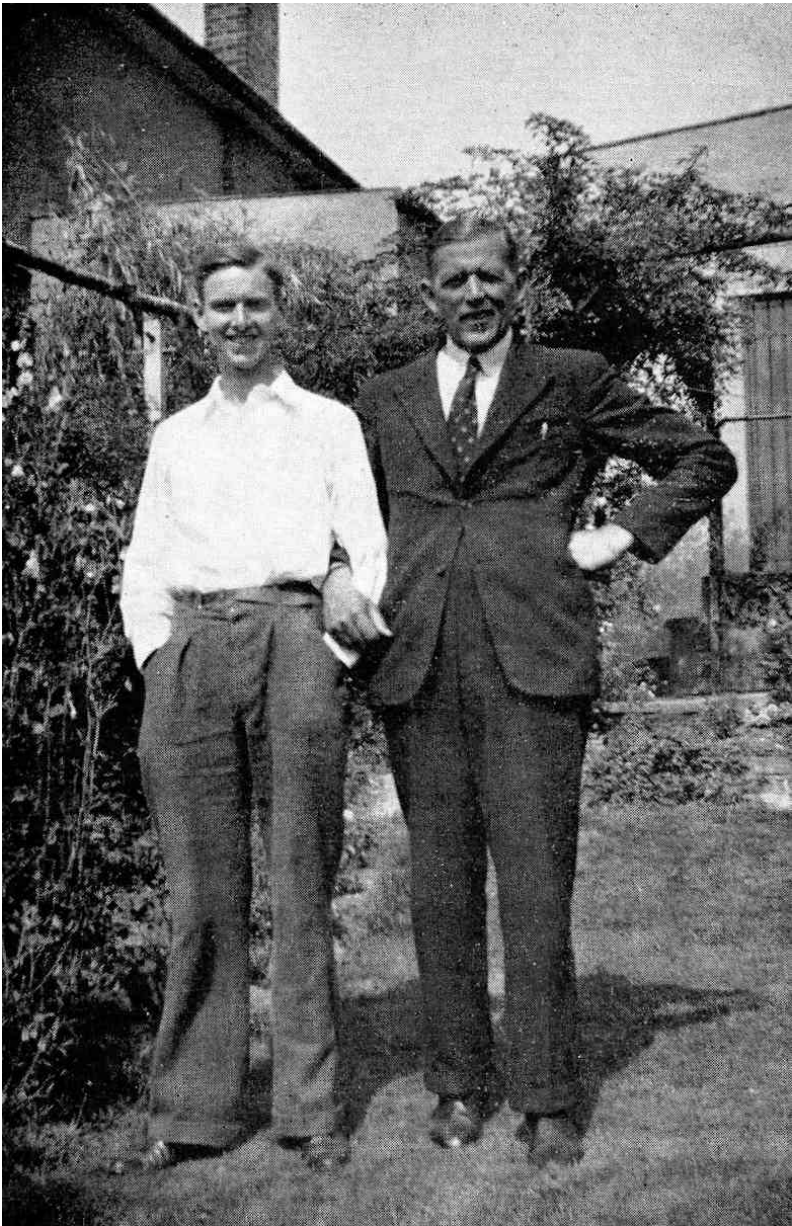
(Post card)

Dear Folks—

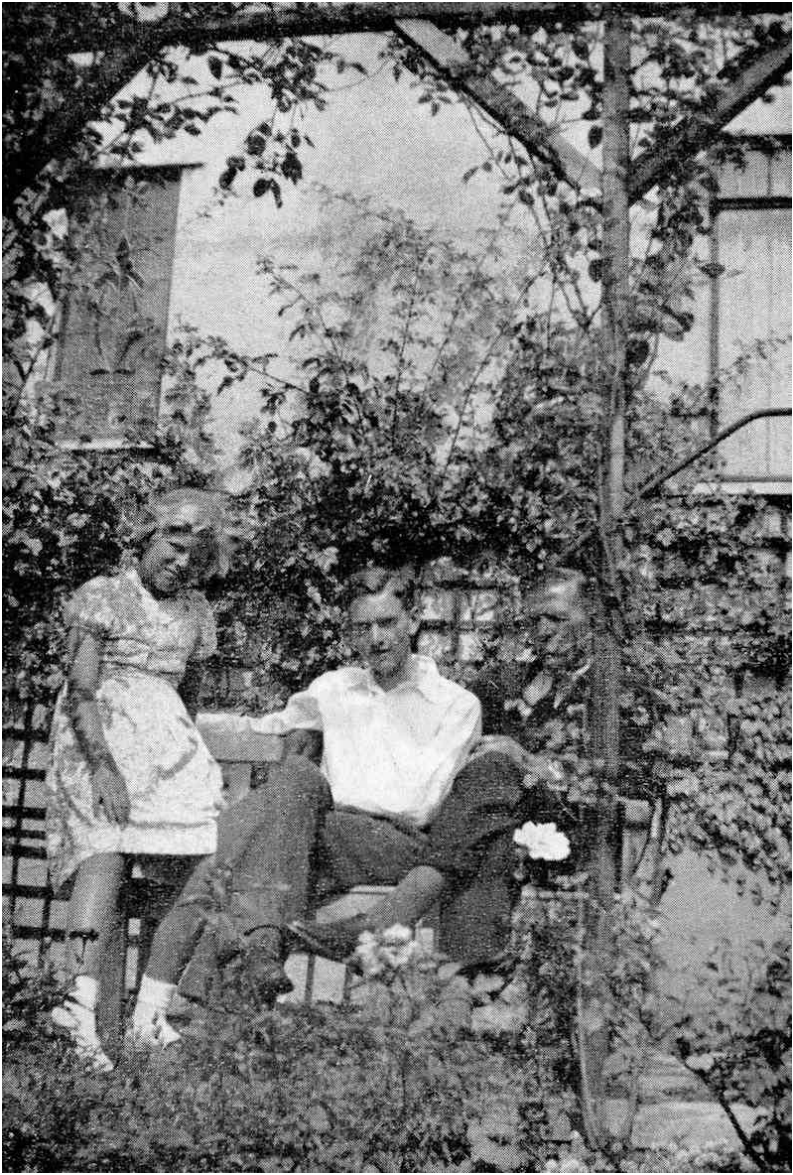
I am on the road! Glorious time. Canterbury, a picturesque little town whose history dates back before the Roman Conquest. The hostel here is famous, a remarkable old 17th Century house remodelled—old-fashioned courtyard—gigantic fireplaces—good accommodation, splendid

companionship. I have not been alone since I left London—days ago.
Cathedral shown is where Thomas à Becket was murdered.

Love to all,
Don



DON AND HIS UNCLE J. R. LIVINGSTONE
England—Summer, 1937



JEAN, DON AND UNCLE JOE
Summer, 1937

Canterbury, 23rd June, 1937

(Post card)

Dear Dorothy;

I hope you are back to your usual health and cheerfulness again. Am having a grand time. Card shows a typical Canterbury street. The archway is the entrance to the Cathedral to which pilgrims have been coming for the last 800 years—a lot of those old quaint houses you see on the card are remodelled inside for use as tea rooms. You can't get a good cup of coffee in England. How is Nancy? If anyone writes now, mail to Heidelberg P.O.—I shall be there in three weeks.

Love,

Don

West Hythe, England

June 24th, 1937

Dear Jim and Folks—Mother, Dad, Dorothy and “Grunt.”

I am writing now from the youth hostel at West Hythe—look at it on a map and you will see that it is a few miles from Folkstone. This is the third hostel I have stayed at and have come to the conclusion that the Youth Hostel Association is a remarkably fine institution—and bicycling the most satisfactory way of seeing England. I shall have lots to tell you about the various personalities I come in contact with—and am making a note or two as I go along.

Outwardly, at least, there is none of that feverish preparation for war that I expected to meet in England. I am the only one so far who has mentioned it in conversation. However—I have noticed signs in various municipalities giving the public instructions how to act in the event of air attacks—also numerous bill-posters showing the glorious and carefree life that is led in the army and what a fine thing it would be to join up and get good meals, good pay, and good entertainment.

June 25th

Had to ride back to Canterbury to-day—forgot my glasses—something for the family to “I told you so” about—so I am back at West Hythe. Two Dutchmen here last night, very nice chaps who spoke very good English. I shall write you at more length from London before I leave for the continent.

Yours sincerely,

Don

P.S. I hope Germany doesn't declare war on the Spanish Government—I should have to revise my plans considerably.

English vocabulary—
posh—something “swell” or luxurious.
ta—(lower class)—thank you!
rummy—used frequently
blimey—Cockney
blimme—

etc.

Canada House, London
July 2nd, 1937

Dear Dad:

Have just rehabilitated my bike for its “Continental tour”—have learned considerable about the art of bicycling and packing provisions—bought a large saddlebag and carrier—knapsacks are too uncomfortable.

Joe and Vim have been grand to me—fed me beautifully and even washed my dirty clothes—Jean is a charming youngster—very polite and obedient—never an “oh yeah” or a “shur.”

I am going to persuade Jim to try and come over for his holidays next summer if he takes a month—Joe would be grand to him and he would love England.

Well—I shall try to get down to writing a decent letter soon—glad to get Mother's and am still anxious about Dorothy—write me now to Munich Post Office—Love to All,

Don

Dover, 5th July, 1937

(Post card)

Dear Marion:

Well, I'm just waiting all by myself in Dover for the boat to leave for Ostend, Belgium, where I will bicycle for about five days and then enter Germany. Spent a day in London with Bill Ralph. Met a Hollander last night at Charing. Will visit him in Holland later in the summer. Last night this Dutchman spoke little English and less Danish—a Dane there spoke no

Dutch and little English—so the three of us conversed in horrible German—well, best of luck; you shall see me in 2 or 3 months.

Don

Assche, Belgium, 7th July, 1937

(Post card)

Dear Mother:

This is what you would look like if you were a Belgian peasant. You can also see the cobblestone roads I have to bicycle on in this town—there are special bicycle paths on the country roads. I stayed at a hotel in Ostend—last night at the youth hostel in Bruges, and am now on my way to Brussels. Belgium is flatter than Canada. It is bi-lingual; Flemish and French.

Love,

Don.

Dusseldorf, 12th July, 1937

(Post card)

Dear Aunt Lou;

You see on the card the main entrance to the great exhibition of modern Germany at Dusseldorf—to-morrow down the Rhine to Koln (Cologne) and so on to Heidelberg. Germany is much better than I expected, despite the uniforms and swastikas you see everywhere—Best of luck.

Don

Dusseldorf, 12 July, 1937

(Post card)

Dear Dad;

“Schaffendes Volk” (A Nation at work)

Am writing from the exhibition of postal service here in Dusseldorf—writing a longer letter to-night or to-morrow to Jim. Had a hard time finding a place to stay in Dusseldorf—throng of people—hostel full—hotels full—finally got a room at a private house. The exhibition is marvellous—too bad I am not more of a technician—the German people have been very decent and helpful—

Don

Cologne, July 13th, 1937

Dear Jim:

Forgive le papier, I just borrowed it from an acquaintance here in the Kolner Youth Hostel. I have not yet written a decent letter home and I doubt if I shall have time to-night to do so. Before going any farther however I shall give you a brief idea of where I have been and what I have been doing during the last two weeks.

I landed at Ostend, Belgium, from Dover about ten days ago, stayed overnight at a cheap hotel and set out across Belgium with the old bike. Five days leisurely travelling brought me through Maastricht in South Holland, and then into Aachen, Germany. I stayed at Aachen and then proceeded to Dusseldorf and spent two days at the Reich economic exhibition, staying at a private residence. To-day I left Dusseldorf and am now in Cologne, staying in one of the largest youth hostels in Germany—a sort of primitive hotel.

To give you a comprehensive survey of my impressions and doings would require a day or two off to assimilate and organize my ideas, and I shall probably do so at Heidelberg since I plan to stay there a week or so.

I was not impressed by Belgium. It is not a forward country. Living expenses are miraculously low but the people are not interesting or particularly friendly. The little bit of Holland I went through was delightful, but Germany is most interesting. I bought a comprehensive guide to the Dusseldorf Exhibition which, when I show it to you, will give you a fair idea of Germany's economic progress.

The German Youth are all organized into the united "Hitler Jugend" and "Maedchen Verbund" and there are thousands of both sexes touring the country in groups, singing Nazi songs and thronging the youth hostels. The girls have returned by compulsion to the old fashioned pig-tails which have always been typically German. They are quite a spectacle.

The youth greet each other with the Heil Hitler salute and are mostly enthusiastic supporters of National Socialism and at the same time grossly ignorant of current developments and political ideologies. There are two sides to modern Germany. To the outside observer who knows no German everything is magnificent. But I shall talk about the other side when I come home.

The German people have been very friendly and are a remarkably robust and healthy race. The Hitler “Jugendbewegung” does that for them but also makes them intellectual perverts. Germany’s industrial progress and economical use of raw materials and waste is amazing. As a result one sees beautiful new roads, flourishing factories, busy hands everywhere. They work hard these Germans and there is a certain amount of truth in Hitler’s philosophy of labor.

Every German youth takes two years military service from his 18th year—consequently one sees youthful soldiers walking the streets all over Germany, enjoying the handsome splendor of their spotless uniforms, ignorant of the dirt and corruption that go always hand in hand with war. I was just through the “Kolner Dom” (Cologne Cathedral), the greatest existing monument to the splendor of Gothic architecture; I’m sorry I don’t know more about art and architecture; this summer would have been of more cultural value if I did. I am a long way off from culture right now, roughing it as it were. I have been travelling mostly alone in Germany but hope to meet up with someone soon whose plans are similar. I also have to cut down on my expenditures. My money is beginning to disappear too rapidly and I should like to stay another month.

I shall drop into the Post Office at Cologne and if there is no letter for me I shall expect one at Heidelberg. I am anxious to hear how Dorothy is getting along. Well I shall have lots to wag my tongue about at 75 Canora, but in the meantime I shall try to make the best of an all-too-short holiday.

Heil Hitler (?)
Don

Heidelberg, 19th July, 1937

(Post card)

Dear Folks:

Heidelberg at last and two letters from home—many thanks. The most beautiful city in Germany—will stay here a week and attend some of the plays at the famous “Festspiele” if I can afford it. Will then leave for Munich—probably hitch-hike—I’ve had enough bicycling for a while—will look up Herr Hack to-day—would love to spend a year in Germany despite the damned soldiers.

Love,
Don.

Heidelberg, 22 July, 1937

Dear Jim and all the Folks:

It's about time I wrote something again, I have been in Heidelberg for about five days and am now staying with Emil Hack, the opera singer and his wife; sleeping on a chesterfield in their living room and eating most of my meals with them. I shall pay some board, I don't know how much. They are both very young, 29 and 27, I believe, and his wife is very pretty.

The last two nights I went to German "Kinas," (cinemas), to try and understand the language—the night before to the full dress rehearsal of the opening play of the great "Reichfestspiele" at Heidelberg—got in through Herr Hack, who sings in the chorus. Play is by a classical 19th century German author—Kleist. The setting was indescribably beautiful. The whole "festspiele" is presented up the side of a mountain in the Heidelberger Schloss an ancient castle which provides an absolutely unique and realistic background for a theatrical performance; hills, roads, balconies, turrets, gates, etc. I shall enclose a prospectus of the plays presented—some more of which I hope to see.

I like Heidelberg—it is the most beautiful little city I have ever seen in my life, nestling down between two mountains at the opening of the Neckar Valley. Anytime I want to meet any Americans I just go to "Seppel's" or the "Red Oxen" two historically famous student locals, where the riotous students of long ago used to gather to lift elbows. They are now "must" places for all American tourists. I travelled with three Americans for a few days into Heidelberg but they had too much money for me.

The unfortunate part of Heidelberg is its popularity with the Americans, who generally come in organized tours, don't know a word of the language, and make themselves expensively disagreeable. They say Heidelberg is an entirely different city in the winter—extremely quiet—but now it is pulsing with every kind of life. I spend a lot of time lying on the banks of the beautiful Neckar River on hot sunny days, taking the odd dip and generally enjoying myself.

When I leave Heidelberg in 5 or 6 days I have an idea I might try hitch hiking down into the Black Forest and then over to Munchen—God knows what my luck will be.

Heidelberg is of course partly spoiled by soldiers, like every other city in Germany—and also by the parade of the Nazi youth movement, which is becoming obnoxious to me. The German newspapers are pretty bad but not

quite so bad as I thought they were—They actually do give some news of France and Britain.

Well, I have to go up town now, but you shall hear from me again.

Sincerely,
Don.

Heidelberg, 23rd July, 1937

[Post card to Marion Duncan]

Dear Muggs;

A picture of romantic old Heidelberg—quite a cozy little town isn't it? You can get a wonderful view of the town and the Neckar valley from the castle, and also from the amphitheatre on the side of the mountain where I was yesterday with the Hacks. Heidelberg is so grand I hate to leave it, but have to see some more of Germany and my money won't last forever. Give my love to Dorothy and Nancy. Will be glad to taste a Canadian breakfast when I get home and also hot buttered toast which I have not had since London.

Love,
Don.

Munich, 30th July, 1937

Dear Folks:

You will be amused to hear of my fruitless attempt to hitch-hike from Heidelberg to Munchen (Munich). I sent my bicycle on ahead by train and with one pack on my back set out along the Neckar Valley, wearing my white sweater with the conspicuous "A" on the front. After walking for about three hours I met a German youth from Mainz whose destination was also Munich, so we joined hands. After about an hour we got a ride about 20 kilometres and our feet were so sore that we took the train to Heilbronn and stayed in the J. Herberg (youth hostel) overnight.

Next day our luck was no better. We parked outside Heilbronn for about three hours waiting for some philanthropic Nazi, and got one lift 10 km. The other chap decided he was too broke now to go to Munchen and took the train back to Heidelberg. I took the train to Stuttgart, stayed overnight in a

hostel, and tried my luck again yesterday. By about noon I had gone 20 km. so I took the train to Munich, a 6 hour trip.

I am staying for a few days in a pension until a room is free at the "Studentenwhonheim," a very cheap boarding house for students. Professor Burzle helped me find a place and took me to lunch to-day. I plan to stay in Munich for a couple of weeks and study the language at the summer school course for foreigners.

I took a trial lecture to-day and met Jos. Reid there, (the 1935 Rhodes Scholar from Winnipeg who is summering in Germany). I also hope to meet Bill Ralph and Ed Lowden later in Munich if they ever arrive. I think I shall probably leave for England, after seeing some of central Germany, near the end of August.

Fifteen minutes just elapsed, during which I took my first hot bath in ten days. It was certainly refreshing and badly needed. The Germans are not so down-trodden, starving, and unhappy as our newspaper reports would have us believe. On the contrary, they are singularly happy and proud of their clean, healthy, and powerful country.

Despite this, however, they are fed a constant diet of the most incredible, intellectual nonsense in their daily newspapers—Communism and Jewry are synonymous—Russia, to the Germans, is a Red Hell ruled by unscrupulous Jews who worship materialism and wish for a world revolution of the proletariat. America is a country where an aristocracy of wealth rules, and is in a state of rapid decay due to the thousands of strikes originated by Jews. No one seems to have ever heard of Canada—"part of America, isn't it?"

Well it won't be long now before you see me back at "75," since my German money is beginning to run rather low. When I get home I should like to take a couple of first term courses at the University in history and economics and then do my damndest to get on a newspaper. I shall try to scrape up an article or two on Germany on the boat on the way home.

Give my love to Dorothy and the newest generation and tell Angela I think I have cured myself of complaining about what I get to eat.

Best of love to all
Don.

Munchen, 6th August, 1937

(Post card)

Dear Jim;

The “Hofbrauhaus,” is one of the most famous beer houses in Germany. Went there last night—waited half an hour for seats—thronged with hundreds of Americans sowing their second wild oats in Europe. You can’t order less than a litre of beer—about a quart and it costs about 15 cents. One half pint of best beer in the world costs 4 cents. Prof. Burzle has written to Berlin to enquire whether I could obtain the Humboldt scholarship and study journalism for two years—if so I should have to study another year at Manitoba. Hope you enjoy your holidays when they arrive or have you had them?

Sincerely,
Don.

Munchen, 6th August, 1937

(Post card)

Dear Mother:

Yesterday I went to the post office and got all your letters,—yours—Dad’s—Jim’s—Marion’s and one from Dave Bowman—was naturally delighted. This is the university where I have been taking the odd lecture. Was tickled to get the picture of Dorothy and Nancy. Since I may as well see all I can when I can, I think I’ll take a train excursion to Garmisch in the Bavarian Alps and ride back down hill to Munchen with bike—then probably strike out for Middle Germany with my bike as long as *It* and *I* last—then take the train either to Hamburg or try to squeeze in a week in France before England again.

Best of Love,
Don.

Schoneck, 14th Aug., 1937

(Post card)

Dear Folks:

You won't find Schoneck on the map. A little village in Saxony where I am staying with Herbert Windish, a friend I met on the boat. He has been grand. I am writing from the Ratskeller—town hall beer cellar where a friend of Herbert's has been buying me beer and 15 minutes ago, hearing that I liked mushrooms, an order of mushrooms and egg omelette.

Best of Love,
Don.

Schoneck, Saxony
14 Aug., 1937

Dear Jim:

If you look on a large map of Germany you may find "Schoneck" (Beautiful Corner) southwest of a town called "Plauen" in Saxony near the Czeck border.

I left Munchen about four days ago and bicycled as far north as Pegnitz, where I took the train to Bayreuth—having stayed overnight at Ingolstadt and Schwabac—and a few hours in Nuremberg. In Bayreuth I met a girl in the Verkehrs Buro (travellers' information) who had been in Montreal for five years. She was glad to talk to a Canadian, is dying to get back, and after lunch she gave me a letter to deliver personally to her best friend in Montreal. It won't be much trouble—, funny the people one meets travelling alone.

Schoneck is situated on the top of a hill, the highest town in Saxony (I'd have never got here on my bike) and the country is grand. Yesterday, Herbert and I and a friend of his, the sole editor of the town rag, movie critic, art critic, news reporter, music critic, etc., went to Bad Elster, a famous "watering place" where we had coffee and cakes. Last night we sat around in the quaint old Ratskeller, drinking beer, while another friend of Herbert's, quite a clown, tried his best to sell National Socialism to me.

Herbert is a very nice little fellow and his mother and father are grand. His father is a dealer in old violins and manufacturer of musical instruments—they are both experts. Herbert decided 9 years in Kansas City were enough of American materialism for him so he has come back to join his father's business and look for a wife.

Incidentally I sold my bike in Bayreuth for about what I paid for it. It is impossible to bicycle through these mountains, anyway one month or more bicycling is enough for anyone. I want to leave Germany without having to

buy any more marks so I think I'll see Berlin instead of Paris, then take a train to either Hamburg or Ostend, probably Hamburg and thence by boat back to London. I shall have enough money to stay another couple of months in England and look for a job, I shall think it over when I go back. It would be impossible to get a job in Germany because of the language and the employment restrictions. It's funny, Jim, everywhere you go people say, "Good Lord, you can't think of leaving Germany without seeing Dresden, or Weimar, or Leipzig," or this or that, but I'm not an American tourist with American money am I?

I'll talk to the editors of our papers when I get home, if I manage to get an interview, and ask their advice whether two years in Germany would help me at all for journalism. You know what German journalism is, but I imagine the work would be studied fairly objectively in the university. However, this is all just an idea. It may be impossible to get the scholarship.

I'm not so sure Jim, that working for a year in London unless for a newspaper would do me any good. I don't know whether you realize how damned insignificant and unimportant I would be in a city like that, furthermore it is hard to make friends there. I have read very little this summer and am beginning to miss the leisure to read. I want to dip into some good studies of modern developments of Europe now that I have seen something with my own eyes and talked to hundreds of people. I think I have the German point of view fairly well. The main thing with them is this: "We have regained our prestige, we all have work, and we all have food. Why shouldn't we believe in our leader?" John Gunther was right Jim (was it Gunther?), the people love Hitler. I have not been in a house, bedroom, restaurant, or hotel where there wasn't a picture of old Adolf.

Well, forgive me for sort of rambling in this letter but I have just written along as one thing or another came into my head.

Yours very sincerely,
Don.

P.S. see signs like this all over Germany.

—
You

- (1) Juden sind hier unerwünscht (Jews are not wanted here).
- (2) Die Juden sind Deutschlands Un Gluck (the Jews are Germany's misfortune).
- (3) Kampf dem Verderb!! (Fight against waste—i.e. don't waste any food because of shortage).

- (4) Deutschland—deine Kolonien! (Germany—your Colonies!!)
- (5) Vermeiden Fremdwörter (Germany—avoid foreign words in your language—this is part of their nationalism).
etc., etc., etc. and the entrance to a small town.

UNSER GRUSS IST HEIL HITLER. (Our form of greeting must be Heil Hitler.)

WITH GERMANS IN GERMANY

By D. A. D.

The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it . . . a State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes—will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished; and that the perfection of the machinery to which it had sacrificed everything will in the end avail it nothing, for want of the vital power which, in order that the machine might work more smoothly, it has preferred to banish.
—*Mill's Essay on Liberty.*

(An article in two parts, a Canadian student's experiences, observations, and conversations in Nazi Germany.)

I spent two months in Germany this summer (1937). An adequate knowledge of the language enabled me to talk and travel with hundreds of Germans. I was particularly interested in the youth, in their personal and collective reactions to the "Zwang" or compulsion, which is now such a vital factor in their lives.

Staying at many youth hostels, I had an opportunity to meet scores of German youth from every part of the country. Many of them were at an age when they were just reaching intellectual maturity, on an educational diet strongly fortified with national socialistic propaganda.

By staying at youth hostels, German boys and girls can travel very cheaply, and everyone is encouraged by the State to cultivate a consciousness and appreciation of the natural and architectural beauties of his country, through group travel by foot or by bicycle. This travel is an essential part of the huge "Hitler-Youth Movement."

Despite a frugal and somewhat unbalanced diet, these young people are remarkably healthy and well developed physically, friendly, generous and eager to talk about their country. But after talking to a good number of the boys, I began to suspect that their individualism was almost completely submerged in the collective German mind. Their mental processes were similar. Whenever I questioned any one of them about the nature of his worship of Hitler, he generally replied somewhat in this fashion "Until

Hitler came to power, until the ‘Machtubernahmung’ as we call it, Germany was a persecuted nation, suffering the humiliation of Versailles, infested with Communism and powerful Jewry, burdened by unemployment, disorganized by political factions and inhibited by a national inferiority complex. Hitler has united us, purged us of the undesirable, vicious elements, reduced unemployment, and restored our national and international prestige.” This argument seems to embody the basis of their faith in Hitler. Truths, half-truths and doubtful truths about the “Fuehrer” have been drilled into their receptive minds through propaganda and suggestion.

I visited two labour camps and talked to representative young men from different parts of Germany. With a party of foreign students I was shown around one camp near Munich, by the chief officer, a heel-clicking militarist who was fairly bursting with pride and enthusiasm over the clockwork efficiency of his camp.

Every German youth, rich or poor, peasant or student, must serve six months “Arbeitsdienst.” The lads all spoke enthusiastically about their work and defended the institution by various arguments. One said it was “a form of education”, another said “it enables the peasant to work on equal terms with the more cultivated and thus helps to break down class barriers.” Many claimed that it provided a “welcome and physically valuable change from sedentary work.” But above all, they were proud to do their share in supporting the comprehensive plans of their Government.

We watched them digging irrigation ditches, eating lunch, marching in formation to Nazi songs, performing gymnastics and spade drill; we visited the kitchens and inspected their sleeping quarters.

Although the conducting officer insisted that this labour service had nothing to do with the army, their spade drill was just mock rifle drill, and the arduous fence climbing in full uniform was obviously training for trench warfare.

Their evenings are free, with occasional lectures on problems of modern Germany. They receive no wages. Those who don’t like it, must learn to like it.

I was particularly impressed by the frugality of the German people, especially the youth. Two and a half years in the army and labour service leave them generally over twenty before they can earn their own living; then many go to high school. Wages in their early apprentice years are very low, and marriage without a State bonus is very difficult.

Holidaying in youth hostels, thousands of German boys and girls live on about eight marks a week, (\$3.20) dieting mostly on wurst, black bread, jam and milk. Contrary to popular belief, however, I saw no evidences of “free love” at the hostels, the sleeping quarters of both sexes were always separated and supervision was strict.

In most of the homes I stayed at, the “Kampf dem Verderb” (fight against waste) slogan was carefully observed. Whatever waste food was not utilized was set aside to be collected by the State and used for swine fodder; this helps keep the price of pork reasonably low and even the poorest can always buy wurst. Litter of all kinds is also collected and used for manufacturing purposes.

The national exhibition at Dusseldorf, of Germany’s economic progress under the four-year plan, has numerous exhibits of products made from scraps and litter that has been collected by State officials. Their use of chemistry in the manufacture of “Ersatz” substitute products is also strikingly portrayed by an exhibit of a railway coach, of which the interior is furnished entirely with synthetic materials. Nothing is wasted in Germany.

I talked to many young men serving their two years with the army. When our conversation turned to the probability of a major European war, they always claimed emphatically “We don’t want war.” “We must regain our colonies and minorities in the East by peaceful means,” many told me. They don’t want war, but they seem to demand the fruits of victory.

When I suggested that many of Hitler’s speeches were threatening in tone, they invariably referred me to one or another of his more pacific declarations. Several young soldiers told me they had sufficient confidence in Hitler’s integrity to accept his judgment if any issue should arise.

On the other hand, many Germans expressed a fear of Russia, that Russia was still determined on international communism. Several people claimed that a war with Russia was inevitable, that there was no room in Europe for both Fascism and Communism, that Fascism would, in the course of history, dominate in the world.

A pleasant old war veteran in Bayreuth, informed me very politely that England was destined to fight another war against Germany, that she must suffer the judgment of God for starving the German armies during the Great War; but the majority spoke for peace, and claimed that an aggression by Germany was unthinkable.

I did not meet many people who dared to express downright dissatisfaction with the Nazi regime. They were mostly enthusiastic about the regeneration of their country; but I did meet some, who, in the relative sanctity of their private homes, aired their grievances against a dictatorial Government. They complained against the so-called “voluntary” taxes for unemployment relief, the newspapers, the low wages, the armament development and the loss of a voice in government; they believed in democracy. Outside their own homes, however, they were ardent national socialists. Hitler’s picture, of course, was in their homes—significant of their political silence.

One proprietor of a little refreshment booth in Neuss, when I accosted him late one night for a coca-cola, was rather amusing. I made some remark about the Nazi regime; he glanced around furtively, leaned over and, with a distasteful grimace, pointed both thumbs to the ground. “It’s going to lead to war,” he whispered, as I paid for my drink.

Part 2

Many people I talked to, admitted that the controlled press did not provide very informative reading on international developments, but they argued that such a measure was necessary to preserve national unity. The “Sturmer” the anti-semitic organ of Julius Streicher, is the most disgraceful newspaper in Germany. It is still posted on bulletin boards all over the country. Each issue contains a leading story, castigating the Jews, and often a list of Jewish shops in a certain district which Aryans are asked to avoid.

The frequent strikes that occurred in America this summer, were all frontpaged or headlined in the German press. Consequently, many Germans believe America is tottering on the verge of a Jewish-Communist revolution. Of Russia, they receive little information, but pages of denunciation. England seemed to me to be more fairly treated, although several Germans still seem to think Anthony Eden is a Jew. I listened to many arguments in defense of the controlled press; I should like to send them all a copy of J. S. Mill’s essay on *Liberty*.

I saw no evidence of “Jew baiting” in Germany. The average German is, I am convinced, too inherently decent openly to insult a Jew, but the propaganda led by the “Sturmer” is doing what work remains to be done. Bicycling with a friendly young German one day, we passed an attractive, tastefully dressed young Jewess. “A pretty girl,” I remarked. “Yes,” he replied simply, “but not one of us.”

The *Mother Goose* picture book designed to educate children by cartoons and rhymes about the horrors of the Jews, has been withdrawn from circulation, because it was defeating its own purpose. Tourists were buying copies as rapidly as they came off the press, and intelligent Germans were shocked by the coarse ridiculousness of the cartoons. The most insidious propaganda against Jews, was, in my opinion, the signs posted at the entrance to little towns “Jews are not wanted here.”

I questioned many non-Catholics about their opinions on the recent convictions of Catholic priests on charges of immorality. They did not seem to know much about it, since the press was discreetly silent, but many suggested that the charges might be somewhat “exaggerated.” A Catholic with whom I stayed in Heidelberg, strangely enough, told me that he thought the church was in need of a good purging.

An American student in Bonn told me he had recently been attending a Catholic church there, and had been amazed at the priest’s open denunciation of certain Nazi legislation. One Sunday he was taking notes of the sermon and the priest paused momentarily to say “I see some people taking notes of what I am saying, but let me tell them that what I have to say is for the ears of all Germany.” The American expects the priest’s arrest any day now.

The attempt by the German Government to direct the creation of a strictly national culture, is strikingly portrayed in the recently opened “House of German Art” in Munich. This exhibition of modern German art is flavored with a scattering of paintings of German battleships, submarines, soldiers, and Nazi officials. These are considered by the dictators of culture, appropriate subjects for the genius of their artists. In contrast to this virile new art, is the exhibition of degenerate art of the pre-Nazi “decadent” era. Incidentally, the latter exhibition attracted far more visitors.

A foreign student at Bonn, showed me a copy of an address delivered to a literary society by a prominent and popular German novelist; it was in defence of freedom of expression in literature, and criticized the attempts of the Government to direct poetry and art along specified channels. This address had been censored, but copies were circulating among professional circles.

I questioned many people about their attitude to the new Aryan creed of Nordic superiority; hardly anyone seemed to take it very seriously, nor did I meet anyone who was at all interested in General Ludendorff’s new religion “Neo-paganism.”

Most Germans I talked to, hoped I would report a favourable impression of Germany to my friends. A democratic education, however, prevented my coming home with a swastika in my mind.

There is a great deal to admire in modern Germany. I liked the courteous, kind and industrious people; I enjoyed with them the beauty of their country, and the flavor of their wine. Like all tourists, I marvelled at their new highways, their giant construction programmes, their efficient administration, the joyous pride of their newly awakened national consciousness, the idealism, if perhaps misdirected, of their youth. I admired their jealous preservation of national customs and dress, their classical opera, their love of nature, but I sickened at the propaganda; it may be creating a better country, it may be in the service of a great ideal, but it is stifling individuality. It can, as has been remarked, make anything popular—even death.

RUDYARD KIPLING

By

D. A. D.

(*Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 April, 1938)

Bicycling through the County of Sussex in England last summer, I happened to stop overnight at a slumbering little village called Burwash Weald. I was soon informed that the residence of the late Rudyard Kipling was down in the nearby valley. A dim literary conscience, stimulated by idle curiosity, prompted me to see the home where England's beloved old poet had spent the long and quiet evening of his life.

At the bottom of a narrow valley, snugly nestled between two old farms and surrounded by a jealous-looking hedge, lay the "Batemans," as his former home is called. This valley, in its tranquil green beauty and fertility, seemed like a little world in itself where time had stopped and Eternity had begun. It was more than a view, almost a vision. No wonder the pastoral charm of this utopian sanctuary had captivated the sensitive imagination of Kipling and seduced him into a life of seclusion.

I visited the next-door neighbors, a pleasant farmer and his wife, and I talked to him as he worked over the beehives that Kipling, shortly before his death, had bequeathed to him. He told me all about Kipling's interest in bee-raising and his superstitions about bees. "Always tell your secrets to the bees," Kipling had told him, "otherwise you will be sure to run into trouble." Strangely enough this little superstition is set forth in one of Kipling's poems on the bee.

He asked me in for tea, and told me how sympathetically Kipling had fitted into the humble life of the villagers. He never, it appears, talked to them about his literary work, but always about affairs of local importance, bees, harvests, gardens.

He showed me the copies of Kipling's works that Kipling had given him, then he took me outside and showed me the well on his farm, the "oast room," the windmill, all of which had been part of the setting of "Puck of Pook's Hill." The whole atmosphere and setting of Puck had been born out of this valley.

Then he showed me his prized possession, a book called the “ABC of Bee-raising”, which Kipling had given him, and told him how to profit by it. I wonder how profound a grasp this humble farmer had of the essential and innermost elements of Kipling’s personality? Deeper probably than many students of his literature.

I liked this farmer and his wife and they were delighted at my praise of their tastefully furnished and scrupulously clean little home, which, like many little farm houses in the district, was old and rich in local history and legend. Like Kipling himself, these people were imbued with the restful spirit of their environment and quietly aware of the humbler felicities of life.

MONEY

By

D. A. D.

(*Winnipeg Free Press*—18th April, 1938)

Some people devote their lives to money; others devote their money to life. But neither can live without some money. Even the garret poets must have some means to live. They are like the poet Robinson's Miniver Cheevy: "Miniver scorned the gold men sought, but sore annoyed was he without it."

Samuel Butler, that unpopular arch-critic of the Nineteenth century and prophet of the Twentieth, had nothing but contempt for his contemporary *littérateurs* who despised money. Butler once wrote, "Money is the most important thing in the world." So Butler, in his young manhood, went to New Zealand, raised sheep, made a considerable fortune, and returned to England to devote himself to the pleasures of the mind.

Shaw echoes Butler with "Poverty is our greatest vice"—and few living writers knew poverty so intimately as Shaw. This self-imposed poverty of many writers embitters both their lives and their writings.

While our modern industrial age with wealth as its arbitrary criterion of success, blushes guiltily as it reads Ruskin's plea for the acquisitions of spiritual wealth before material, Sinclair Lewis appeals to the sanity of aspiring young writers, urging them to get jobs—any jobs, and write in their leisure. Such security would undoubtedly keep their pens out of the poison-ink of poverty-bred Communism.



The struggle for existence forces many “incorrigible individualists,” writers and artists, into a routine life. To create they must have a subsistence—they must consume. And to consume economic law requires that they produce. They find they have to go to work. But does that mean spiritual suicide? Was Wordsworth absolutely right when he wrote that “Getting and Spending we lay waste our powers”?

Charles Lamb was a drudge, yet he left us the priceless *Essays of Elia*. The discouraging monotony of Matthew Arnold’s educational work did not

destroy his poetic genius. Are budding young writers justified in denouncing the world for making them wage slaves, or starving them while they meditate the thankless muse?

There is no reason why running a filling-station or managing a market-garden should deprive them of all nourishment for the mind and spirit and dry up the springs of creation. I should like to see some of our starving highbrows and Communists “from intellectual conviction” go to work; the genuine ones would survive, create, and become a part, not a spectator of life; and no one would mourn the disappearance of the dyspeptic aesthetes.

INCOMPATIBILITY

By

D. A. D.

(Winnipeg Free Press—25 Aug., 1938)

Woodsworth wants Utopia
For the next generation;
Herridge wants it now—
With no procrastination.

Now would it have worked?—
That political marriage
Of J. S. Woodsworth
And W. D. Herridge?

SAILING

(*Winnipeg Free Press*—13 July, 1939)

A sudden gust of wind whips the restless surface of the bay into frothy white-caps. The boom swings out quickly as the sail thrusts out its breast to take a deep inhalation. The trim, impertinent little “moth” bounds forward impatiently, the bow slapping the waves in careless rhythm . . . Now we are sailing.

And a graceful and beautiful sight we are indeed, to the watcher on the shore. But only the person in the boat knows the real grace of swift and quiet motion toward a faint horizon, where two rich shades of blue unite; understands the beauty of a full-blown sail leaning against the sky.

And for the next hour, to make enjoyment keener, we shall pay homage to pagan gods—the sun and the waters. Only the sun-worshipper is filled with glory when Sol smiles down upon him with warm generosity from a luxurious sky. Only the water-lover appreciates all the joys of the lake—the cool splash on sunbaked body, the moving patterns changing breezes etch on the surface, the varied and scintillating colours.

Grand fun is sailing, curiously beneficial too. It relaxes the body, replenishes the spirit, opens the windows of the imagination. Sober thinking on mundane things disturbs the harmony of a sail. But strange and powerful memories of “Moby Dick,” perhaps, idle into mind, as the boat leaps proudly forward and you search expectantly for signs of the white whale. Or you may hear melodies again from the storm-symphonies of Conrad’s “Typhoon”; above it all, the gruff stubborn voice of Captain MacWhirr ordering the crew to drive straight into the gathering storm. Or vivid sea-scenes from “Two Years Before The Mast” may flood the imagination. It is good, too, to think of nothing,—only keeping the boat afloat.

Yes, keep the boat afloat. Perhaps that is what makes sailing more fun for the novice. For him the boat is often subtle and malicious—likely to shy anytime, like a high-spirited race horse; the mellow waters assume treacherous proportions, inviting the boat to plop sideways into their depths; the beneficent sky is only a fair-weather friend—unreliable—likely to frown down unexpectedly with lowering disapproval on the smug craft. All this means pleasurable excitement, demands some skill, makes the minutes live.

Perhaps the veteran loses that mild thrill. But has he not still the sun and the wind and the sky?

An honorable baptism into sailing is to tip (if you can swim; but if you love the water well enough to want to sail, surely you will have learned to swim). By tipping you learn to humor the boat's eccentricities, to respect the elements, to realize the need for skill at the helm.

A sailboat, however small and unimposing, is to me the most exciting and proudest of all water craft. No insistent whirl of motors to drown one's peace in sputtering frenzy; no paddles or oars that spell sweat and exercise, not enjoyment; no elaborate comforts that bring your stuffy home with you on to the waters. Only sitting room, a tall sail, a rope and rudder in either hand.

At the lakeside, the wealthy man next door must have the hard-earned luxuries of his expensive launch. The friendly, earnest broker around the corner must have his rowboat to keep fit. The moonlight lovers, who are legion, would grumble sadly without their cushioned canoes. Speed-fans would squirm with boredom without their high-powered motor-boats. There are many ways of enjoying the waters. To each his pleasure.

But give me a sail!

DANZIG DILEMMA

By

D. A. D.

(*Winnipeg Free Press*—9 Aug., 1939)

Self-chosen interpreter
Of the Nazi-German soul,
Silent on a mountain-top
He acts his awesome role.

Disturbing Wagner music
Creates the proper mood
Of psychopathic ecstasy
In which he starts to brood.

With strange obsessed intensity
He labours to contact
The soul of blood and iron
That guides him when to act.

Shall I now take Danzig
Or wait a month or two?
A world of anxious mortals
Still wonders what he'll do.

HERR HITLER

By D. A. D.

(Winnipeg Free Press)

I, Hitler the painter, the Nordic, the hater,
Dictator, Jew-baiter, and peace-liquidator,
Am sprung from the loins of brave Wotan and God,
Inspired with a faith derived from the sod.

My sacred ambition, my life's holy mission,
My brown-shirted, barbarous, blinding obsession,
Is to waken all Europe to the might of the Hun,
And navigate Germany into the Sun.

(Winnipeg Free Press, October 12, 1940)

WITH THE WINNIPEG LIGHT INFANTRY AT CAMP

By Private 2424

The Winnipeg Light Infantry, Non Permanent Active Militia, Spent a Two Week Period at Fort Osborne Military Camp, August 17-31. One of Five Regiments Making Up the 7th Infantry Brigade. The following is a New Recruit's Impression of Camp Life.

Night has fallen. Serried rows of circular tents stretch out over the level field and disappear in the tranquil darkness. The faint echo of a bugle call, sounding Lights Out has just faded and died. It is 10.16 o'clock (22.16 hours in the army). A lantern flickers in the orderly tent, where a pen is scratching. The dark figure of a sentry is silhouetted for a moment against the lighter shadows of a nearby roadway. Only muffled whispers can be heard along the lines; soon these fall away and a cloak of silence envelopes the camp, broken only by the intermittent chirping of crickets.

Nestled in his blankets, Private 2424 closes his eyes, tries to order his thoughts. This is his first night at camp. His thoughts are chaotic—the colorful, hustle and bustle of arrival, muster parade, issuing of equipment, occupation of his new tent, home, dinner, games. Too tired to think he smiles wearily as his lips murmur: “you’re in the army now.” And before the crickets have renewed their song, he’s asleep.

Dawn breaks cold and hard and grey. Reveille sounds at 5.30 o'clock, before the rising sun has mellowed the damp chill of night. Private 2424 crawls cautiously out of his cozy nest of blankets. Shivering, he struggles into his uniform, scratches and tugs with numb fingers at his stiffened army boots. Dressed, he heads for the ablution tables, resolutely splashes into cold water. Fully awakened, shaved and shivering, he plunges back into his tent. “Well, what’s coming next?” he asks himself doubtfully. A raw recruit, he wisely decides to follow the example of his more knowing buddies. They are dragging their straw-stuffed palliasses out of their tents, neatly folding their blankets, and methodically laying out their kits. So 2424 does likewise, wondering what the folks at home would think if he displayed such tidiness voluntarily.

His tent-walls rolled, kit in order, he's beginning to feel hungry, when the fall-in order is heard and he lines up for the exercise march. "What, exercise before breakfast? . . . come, come now, after all . . ." but before he knows it he's marching through the camp gate, a merry whistle on his lips, gulping deep drafts of the intoxicating air.

The brief march over, he is now so hungry he is beginning to feel sorry for himself. At 7 o'clock breakfast parade call is sounded—"come to the cookhouse door, boys." He snatches up his dishes, and, like a startled deer, bounds into line sniffing the air hopefully for manifestations of cookery.

En route to breakfast, he is aware that he's feeling remarkably good, warm, glowing, fit, alert. He hasn't had such an appetite for months. Perhaps, after all, that cold water and exercise were worth it, he concludes philosophically. Yes, he is learning the value of discipline. Breakfast is plain, wholesome and plentiful; but to the famished recruit it is a Gargantuan feast. There's no mistake about this. Private 2424 has rediscovered the joys of eating.

Battalion parade is at 8 o'clock. During the inspection, the company commander finds Private 2424 and some of his colleagues-in-arms sadly wanting. His shoes weren't shined; nor the buttons on his wedge cap; and his tunic isn't buttoned at the top. "You're in the army now, boys," he learns. He takes the hint. Next time he'll know better.

The day's training begins immediately. Private 2424 stumbles and flounders through squad and platoon drill. His feet stubbornly refuse to do what his mind tells them to do. He's not alone in his troubles. Others are a little awkward, too. He soon learns not to stand transfixed in abject bewilderment when the drill sergeant shouts at him (and drill sergeants can shout); instead he snaps into action—fast, mentally and physically alert. Company drill . . . rifle exercises . . . care of arms . . . the sun beats down now, high in the sky. The morning swiftly passes.

He eats an incredible dinner at noon; tackles drill in the afternoon with renewed vigor. He is losing some of his awkwardness, gaining confidence and precision, beginning to enjoy it all. At 4 o'clock the battalion is dismissed for physical training and games. After that the cool blessing of a shower.

Within the necessary limitations of camp discipline, the rest of the day is now his own. Private 2424 lies down near his tent and smokes a meditative cigarette. His legs ache, his nose is sunburnt and tender, his feet are sore; but

he's happy. Regulated physical activity has swept the cobwebs from his mind; he feels very much alive.

When supper parade is called at 5.30 o'clock, he is more than ready for it. Once more hunger transforms a homely table into regal fare. At 6 o'clock Private 2424 is standing dish in hand at the cookhouse counter, asking like *Oliver Twist*: "Please may I have some more?"

The evening hours pass quickly and pleasantly; chats with his buddies, jokes and laughter and songs, fellowship in the canteen, friendly inter-platoon, inter-company, or inter-battalion rivalry on the volley-ball courts, the baseball diamond or the horse-shoe pitch.

He has already made three friends—his tent-mates. During the day he had laid the foundation of new friendships. No loneliness here; no dullness. From many walks of life, from many races, are the men who volunteered to serve with the W.L.I. Each one stepped willingly out of his civilian world to go to camp; each with his own contribution to regimental spirit and camp morale; each subjected to the same discipline, required to measure up to the same standards. It is good to meet these men, work with them, play with them, and examine the various furniture of their minds. So experiences are exchanged and tales are told as darkness deepens over the camp. Lights out again at 10.15. Bed so early?—intolerable, you think. But when the time comes, you are ready for it; your mind and body cry out for rest.

During the succeeding days of those memorable two weeks, Private 2424 gradually adapts his mind and body to the new way of life. He is making interesting and illuminating discoveries. One of these is that the rigid discipline under which the camp operates is not arbitrary and exacting, but sensible. It is based, he comes to realize, on common sense, combined with the accumulated wisdom of generations of soldiering. It is designed to yield the soldier the maximum of military and physical training and recreation with the minimum of wasted time and danger to health. Without discipline the camp would be chaos, its value to the soldier negligible.

It goes without saying that the W.L.I. officers and N.C.O.'s gave the private soldier no occasions for grievance. But had he felt that he had a grievance, he had an advocate to plead his cause. His advocate is the orderly officer of the day, named by the officer commanding to look after the interests of the men. And let this fact speak for the quality of the men in the W.L.I. lines at camp; not one man committed any offence for which he was "crimed" during the two-week period.

Private 2424 also discovers that the drill sergeants and sergeant-majors who shout at him so rudely all day, are not at all inhuman. They are good fellows, capable and efficient N.C.O.'s doing their job seriously and well—helping to make some sort of a soldier out of him, anxious that he learn. They were shouted at once themselves.

Another discovery; the army camp is almost a self-sufficient unit, doing all its own work other than cooking and skilled labor. Therefore Private 2424 is introduced to fatigues. In the kitchen he learns how potatoes are peeled and rations prepared for 275 men and 19 officers—the W.L.I. camp strength. On sanitary fatigue, he realizes how a military camp is a model of cleanliness, although there are no charwomen (sometimes he wishes there were). Protection—there are pickets and guards. Service—there are canteen fatigues. Administration—there are orderly clerks and N.C.O.'s the quartermaster and the adjutant, with his multifarious duties.

Besides squad, platoon, company and battalion drill, with and without rifles, Private 2424 is learning the elements of field craft, use of ground platoon tactics in attack and defence, signals with rifles, machine-gun crew drill, direct and indirect firing, laying of guns; use of range finder. This is all part of the comprehensive syllabus of training, directed for the W.L.I. by Major D. Williamson, the officer in charge of training. It also includes several demonstrations by specialists from the infantry training centre and lectures by W.L.I. officers.

His second Saturday at camp is an important day for Private 2424. In the morning there is a route march and 2424 finds himself a member of an enemy harassing party. Here he has an opportunity to employ the field tactics he has learned in the past few days. And he employs them successfully. Owing to the regiment's scouts' failure to discover the machine gun nest he and his colleagues have established under cover at the road-side, Private 2424 has the privilege of wiping out the advance guards of the battalion.

But the battalion comes to life again in the afternoon, one hundred per cent strong. For there is an inter-battalion sports day and the W.L.I. is out to win. Private 2424 has been at camp long enough to appreciate the value of sports in contributing to a man's physical health; and he wants the W.L.I. to win. He has learned something about esprit de corps. So he takes part and marches on the field with the athletes. He is defeated in his own event but glad that he took part. And W.L.I. takes second place, losing by a narrow margin to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles. Here were fellowship, keen and

friendly rivalry, salutary fun. The regiment is grateful to those boys who did so well. Privates Rainer, Maine, Dickson, Gammell, to mention only a few.

Two events stand out in his memory as Private 2424 reviews his camp experiences in retrospect. They are not personal experiences; they were shared by nearly all the members of the regiment. W.L.I. broadcast a half-hour program over CJRC Wednesday evening of the second week. There was Captain G. F. Mackie, Master of Ceremonies, round and jolly and effervescent as a bottle of pop, leading the boys in song. His enthusiasm was contagious. From the rollicking opening number, "It's the Soldiers of the King, My Lads," to the quiet dignity of the fade-out, the program was . . . well, simply splendid. God Save The King . . . then Last Post . . . lastly the haunting melody of "Abide with Me," sung by Private J. C. Duncan, accompanied by W.L.I. voices humming, as twilight deepened into night and quiet descended over the camp. And let's not forget Sergeant Cade and Sergeant-Major Carter showing us how to laugh. Yes, the spirit of the regiment made itself felt that evening.

Nor let us forget the battalion inspection by Brigadier H. J. Riley, D.S.O., D.O.C. and staff officers of M.D. 10. Wearing battle-dress, wedge caps, web equipment and haversacks, and carrying rifles, the W.L.I. men "put on the dog." With only elementary training behind them, the men marched with all their hearts. There was no glory in it for them, only hard work under a hot sun with heavy equipment. But the record of the regiment was on trial and that was enough for every officer and man to do his best. A few days ago, they had heard the officer commanding, Lt. Col. N. R. Nagle, E.D., tell the story of the regiment's history. And only the poor in spirit could not have been inspired by the regiment's Great War record, nor proud to be attached to the W.L.I. Brigadier Riley complimented Col. Nagle on the smartness and steadiness of the men and the general performance of his regiment. That was reward enough for the officers and men.

The inspection ended the formal training at camp. That lost Friday evening was given over to fun and frolic, to solidifying friendships and establishing new ones. Saturday morning, breakfast at six. Tents were struck, camp tidied, and the regiment marched out and returned to barracks for dismissal and pay.

What has happened to Private 2424, or to any other new recruit, during those days at camp? He has made a great adjustment, adapted his free and untrammelled civilian habits to the ordered discipline of army life; he has learned to assess the qualities of men by one standard; he has learned to

discipline his body and mind; he knows a little of the grim business of warfare.

Perhaps he has learned more. He may have carried something intangible away with him from camp; something indefinable, something to do with regimental spirit, something to do with patriotism and a citizen's duty in this Canada of ours.

4d,^[1] A.B., Oct., 1940
75 Canora St., Winnipeg

[Twins were born to Mrs. Woodman]

Dear Dorothy,

Congrats—I scarcely believed you had it (I mean them) in you.

I intended to write you long before you multiplied but I just didn't get around to it. I'm certainly glad you took it all in your stride. More power to you! It must be a tremendous relief to have shortened all that sail at once. They tell me Brandon was overcrowded last week-end and I don't doubt it.

Roy was delighted to get your letter. He said he was feeling rather low at the time and it cheered him no end. He had a tough week but he's coming along nicely now. He has been keenly interested in the progress of the battle of the bulge and is very pleased at its successful denouement.

I'd like to get up to Brandon to see you but I have the infernal army lecture class for two hours every Sunday morning. Irv and Eleanor are getting married Nov. 16. Your two-star performance has upset Irv a bit, I think. Lots of love to you and your new boarders. How about names—Hit and Muss? or perhaps Poop and Piddle?

Affectionately,
Don

[1] Four days after Birth.

October 18th, 1940

Dear Miss Snuffle,

So you insisted on being a girl, eh? If you'd had any consideration for your mother you wouldn't have consented to be born at all—Oh yes, I know, a “woman's rights” and all that. However, now you're here I guess you'll have to stay. You can at least keep your brother out of mischief. Look, Miss Snuffle, here's a piece of advice: If people pluck at you and talk gibberish at you don't be polite. It doesn't do any good. Just screw up your little red face and say: “Shoo!”—they'll “Scram” alright,

Be seein' you, Uncle Don.

Oct. 18th, 1940

Dear Mr. Snort,

So you decided to emerge and see the world, eh? Didn't want to be cooped up with a wiggling little sister all your life, I bet. Well now, you're free—what are you planning to do? Go on a bat? No, I know your type; you'll be quite content to bawl and sleep and feed and wet your pants incessantly. Pretty dull life. Why don't you stick your finger in the eyes of the blithering idiots who'll be leering and clucking at you all the time and saying: “Isn't he cute!” Stick around, Mr. Snort, and I'll be seein' you.

Uncle Don.

Understand that what a man is, is something he can be grateful for . . . because if he is good, his goodness is not his alone, it's mine too, and the other fellow's.—“The Human Comedy”

February 21st, 1941, Winnipeg

[To Roy Watson after the death of David Bowman]

Dear Roy:—

Before Dave's funeral I almost wished I were at Calgary with you to avoid it. But now I wish you could have been with us. It was painful—very painful; but magnificent. Rev. Clarke, of Knox Church, knew Dave well, understood him and loved him very much. He spoke at some length about Dave's unselfish work for the church and the community—paid him a great tribute.

It made us all feel doubly conscious of what a remarkably wise and lovable fellow the old gentleman was. It crystallized in our minds—in my mind anyway, for many years to come—the integrity of his character and the charm of his personality. I thought, for a moment, I would like to obtain a copy of Clarke’s tribute, but then I realized how cold and inadequate the words alone would seem on paper without Clarke’s inspired eloquence and deep affection to make them warm and alive.

I remember a few odd phrases, for what they are worth: “a golden disposition;” “he was endowed with a full measure of that rare and elusive thing called charm;” “of a gentle nature, yet he had a healthy capacity for indignation and spoke out with eloquence and sincere conviction against abuses and injustices in this city;” “scorned the superficial—avoided what was cheap or shoddy or meretricious;” “son, brother, friend, lover, this fair young man was indeed a great Christian.”

But as for we sinners, you and Irv and I, I guess it’s the Bowman of the brimming glass, the booming voice, the infectious laugh, the friendly abuse, whom we will remember most fondly. He was though, a much wiser young man than I am—and I am very proud to have been his friend.

Enough though, Watson, I’m bloody well drifting into sentimentality. What a laugh Dave would have got, could he have seen this letter.

Steve is getting fatter and fatter and more and more steeped in the pleasant comforts of married life.

Jim is leaving for Halifax for three months, Sunday. To-day, as a going-away present, I gave him a pen-and-ink drawing, done by our artist, at the office, entitled “An Animated Conversation in the Wardroom, R.C.N.V.R., Winnipeg.” It showed a group of officers sitting around in a circle in front of a fireplace. They all had their noses up in the air. It resembled a deadly and serious hush. Above a sleepy lion’s head frowned down upon the august gathering. Jim got a tremendous bang out of it.

How’s the old health these days? Hope you will be getting home soon. Thanks for the letters.

Sincerely,
Don.

March 19, 1941, Winnipeg
[To Jim a Paymaster in the Navy]

Dear Pay,

I left Wiggins Systems about a week ago (parting is such sweet sorrow) and allowed myself time to slog up on my army exam which I write next Sunday. I have been offered a job in the advertising department of CJRC—but it may not break for a couple of weeks. Am still undecided about taking it or going east or west. As a matter of fact I will very likely be sent to Victoria for a two weeks' qualifying course in the near future. Ottawa has stipulated all Reserve army officers must take it.

Incidentally, Dick [Don's cousin Dick Murray] is now on active service with the Navy at Montreal—"McGill" gave him his degree. If you know of any job at Halifax by which I could get to sea, please let me know and I'll drop the army like a hot-cake.

Why don't you look up the editor of the *Dalhousie Review* at Halifax and, like William Saroyan, tell him you are a genius and send him a story every morning for the next month? If you get a hold of the piece in print, I should like to have a look at it. [An article on Lawrence of Arabia, draft of which Don had corrected and typed.]

Sincerely,
Don

28 May, 1941, Winnipeg

Dear Jim,

The car repair bill covers everything from cabbages to kings, including fish, fowl, and red herring. Mr. Morley found more things to fix, tune up, adjust, replace, correct, take off and add on than I cared to hear about. However, he impressed on me that they were all very necessary to the 1941 good health of your car. Anyway, you'll find the car in good shape when you are ready to take over.

I have been writing a five-minute thrilling weekly programme called "Calling All Drivers" . . . "a Guide to Better Motoring." I've exhausted my imagination and the Free Press safety files and scared myself so badly that I bought a personal accident insurance policy on the "easy-payment" plan.

Radio is a weird sort of business, but rather fun. I have now descended the ladder of literary degradation to the lowest and most sordid rung, from which I derive a certain melancholy satisfaction. First there was the academic stage—"O Wind, if Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

Then the newspaper stage: "Mr. J. A. Poop, of Snoop Street, reported he saw a robin at the corner of Autumn Avenue and Spring Street, which we

can safely take as the first sign of Spring.”

Next, the advertising agency stage: “Spring is here, Motorists—time to have your car overhauled at Grob Brothers’ Service Station.”

And now the radio stage: “You know, folks, Spring seems to be here, tra-la-la—time to get out that trusty old paint brush . . .”

I was fortunate when I started at CJRC that I didn’t have to handle Dr. Ballard’s programme—a fifteen minute session with the “Old Trainer” plugging Dr. Ballard’s Dog and Cat Foods. The programme starts—“Good Evening-g-g-g Pet Lovers.”

However some of the work is quite interesting and the terrific spate of words I have to spew out every day is good experience in making oneself write—mood or no mood.

Went to work with Irv on the Dinghy over the week-end. After we get her ship-shape, Irv and I are going to beg, borrow or steal a motor and make the trip to town just for the fun of it. We can take it back to the lake at your convenience. If you are coming back at the end of May, may I suggest we keep the Dinghy in town for a couple of weeks and try our luck in a couple of Canoe Club Races?

Congratulations on A—coming third in your class and B—appearing in bold, black, distinguished-looking type in the austere, aloof and bespectacled *Dalhousie Review*. To write something good and know someone will read it, is much more fun than sweating, laboring, swindling, and consorting with dullards in pursuit of the almighty dollar.

Did I tell you in my last letter I was turned down for the third and last time by the Navy. Commander Orde—who incidentally is 100% said he would take me at once if I could pass the eye test. He yarned interestingly about his own experiences—a decent fellow and smart as a razor-blade is sharp.

Drop me a line again,
Don

June 3, 1941, Winnipeg

Dear Jim,

I have been reading all your letters with avid interest and making smug mental excuses to avoid replying in kind. But here goes—and first about the Pride, Joy and Light of my life, the S.S. “Nancy” [a 14 foot sailing dinghy].

Three weeks ago I invested my all and then some in a motor—a one-and-half H.P. 1940 Evinrude. Then the fun began, and the fur began to fly. It wouldn't work. Irv Stevenson, Eleanor and I landed down at the lake planning a serene journey by sail and power to Winnipeg. After about six hours fruitless yanking at the pull-cord, I took the infernal mechanical contrivance back to Mr. Broe, of Broe's Boat Yards, and told him pointedly to "get the damned thing going." He did, and off I went to Sandy Hook again. This time it rained and blew. Last week-end it rained and blew some more—but I did get the motor going. However, it only drives the boat at a speed of about three miles an hour, so when I DO make the trip to Winnipeg, I shall rely mostly on sail. Der Tag comes next week-end—I hope, by the grace of the elements, and the damned motor. Anyway I had fun and some good sailing at the lake.

They work the heads off us at CJRC but I get a big kick out of it. I have a programme called "Matinee in Swing." I don't handle the music but I write the introduction, a bit of dialogue and the commercials. I usually start it off with something like this: "It's MATINEE IN SWING—another giddy gallop along the groove, with the favorite swing-bands of the day riding the swing-favorites of the moment" . . . or . . . "It's MATINEE IN SWING—another Saturday serving of jam and jelly to the jitterbugs, with the top tunesters of the day on the menu . . ." and "yours truly, Herbie Brittain, presiding over the tea-cups."

I have another programme which absorbs my profoundest interest—Eaton's Wedding Bureau. It consists of ten minutes' nauseating drivel by Mrs. John Craig, interspersed by two commercials by D.A.D., which are liable to read: "The moving finger writes and having writ moves on, nor all your Piety nor Wit can lure it back to cancel half a line."

"Yes, when your Wedding Ceremony is over—it's OVER. You can't have it repeated just because it didn't go over very well. So if you want to be sure everything flows along smoothly from the first peal of the organ to the last handful of confetti, consult Wilma Blocher, the Bride's Counsellor, at Eaton's Wedding Bureau, on the Fourth Floor . . ."

We have quite a bit of fun in our department. Incidentally, you probably know my new colleague, Lyall Holmes. He's a very pleasant and amusing chap. Every once in a while, when he's absorbed in the "Dog and Cat Club," he breaks forth in a thunderous roar: "I'm not afraid of anything . . . and I'm the man who can do it, too!"

Marion is obviously in seventh heaven in Toronto and her letters gush and gurgle with torrents of enthusiasm and superlatives.

On the cultural front, all has been quiet. But I did find time to read *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and don't pass it by if you can get your hands on it. It's a scream. Mr. Whiteside's opening remark (Woolcott) on the stage, emerging from the sick room, is "I may vomit." He then turns to his host, at whose home he broke his hip in a fall, and says: "I shall sue you for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" He then turns to the butler and demands of his host: "Who are those two harpies standing there like the kiss of death?" When annoyed he shouts at the nurse: "Go away—you great dribbling cow!"

Saw "The Great Dictator" and thought it better than I expected. Chaplin's unique brand of comedy grows on you. Ted Burch expects to have a book published soon, to his complete amazement and delight. He wrote a story about the army, explaining it to women, in light-hearted fashion, and it has been accepted, with revisions, by Ryerson Press, Toronto.

Tomorrow night there is to be a half-hour blackout in Winnipeg, which means great doings for the Winnipeg Light Infantry and yours truly.

My views on the current international situation are unspeakable within earshot of the police. The lamps are certainly out over Europe and God knows how the United States is going to relight them again. However, Churchill says: "Westward look, the land is bright" . . . and I hope he's right.

If I can't get this Evinrude motor running properly, do you think there's any chance of selling it to the Government?

Drop me a line,
Sincerely
Don

Voice from below: "Send Jim my Birthday Greetings." And who could it be but Auntie Lou? . . . And accept, please, my birthday banalities as well.

D.A.D.

June 19, 1941, Winnipeg

Dear Jim,

Herewith the story of the memorable journey of S.S. "Nancy" from Winnipeg Beach to the Winnipeg Canoe Club. A week ago last Sunday, Irv, Eleanor and I disembarked at 7.45 a.m. At 9.00 o'clock we had travelled the tremendous distance of about 400 yards from the Winnipeg Beach Aquatic Club. The motor wouldn't work and neither would the wind. A gentle zephyr finally popped into the painful picture and we were off to Winnipeg at about half-a-mile an hour. By 11 o'clock the breeze had picked up considerably and we were opposite Matlock. Then the fates which had forestalled our previous attempts relented; a fresh breeze got on our tail and we were away.

After an hour's good scudding, Thorkellson breezed by in his streamlined sailboat with a 25 h.p. engine and asked us if we wanted a tow. Did we? Of course. He towed us to about four miles from the river mouth. After he left us, a perfect following wind blew us to the mouth and whipped us ten miles down the river in no time. All was well. Then we got lost. We took the wrong turning and started right back toward the lake in another channel—against the wind. After two miles we woke up and retraced our tracks. We got the motor going at this point and chugged off at about three miles an hour, reaching Selkirk at 8 p.m.—sun-burnt, slightly slap-happy from the long session, and famished. The rest of the trip was made in easy stages on evenings off.

Winnipeg was the worst hurdle. Seven bridges, all too low for the mast. Redwood Bridge was fun. I had a young lady with me and they agreed to open the bridge for us. While the little dinghy circled below, the bridge-master stopped all the traffic and went to work on the swivel. It wouldn't work. So while cars line up on either end of the bridge and crowds gathered to find out what gigantic ship was waiting to pass through, the bridge-master crawled underneath to fix something on the swivel. Finally it opened and we cruised through while North Winnipeg gaped and dozens of motorists undoubtedly cursed our proud little craft. The traffic must have been held up for about 25 minutes—probably holding up important activity in connection with Canada's War Effort.

I was sorry you couldn't have been with me to enjoy some of the trip, but there must be many compensatory pleasures in Sydney. I start a week's holidays shortly, followed by two weeks in the army—perhaps at Dundurn, Sask. This letter has been written in a hurry, so please forgive its slovenliness.

Best of luck,
Don

12th Sept., 1941, Winnipeg

Dear Jim:

First time I have put pen to paper for many months, being a slave to the typewriter.

To-morrow I will ship your books which Dad has packed up nicely. Whence this sudden thirst for monumental dullness? Wordsworth's *Prelude* sparkles only very rarely—in fact it's one of the dreariest things I've ever read. And Milton? To quote Lyall Holmes, "Who the hell are you trying to scare?" The good bits in Milton from what little I've read, are the Satan scenes in *P.L.*, *Comus*, *Samson Agonistes*, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. By the way Lyall read your "Lawrence" and being a Lawrence fan himself pronounced it very good.

I went through exhausting psychological struggles with my better and worse self, making up my mind whether or not to send you *Bartlett*. It's mine you know or do you know? Anyway you got it only by bribery by sending me the *Snow Goose* which I enjoyed muchly.

Speaking of books, Ted Burch's *So I said to the Colonel* should be out soon. I'll send you a copy when it appears. Esse Ljungh, CJRC chief producer, is producing a play of his own. It's called *But the Earth Endureth Forever*,—a very fine bit of writing. Esse is devoted to *Ecclesiastes* and reads it, he tells me, several times a year.

I am going into the news end at CJRC! Ev Dutton will be away for two weeks. This plunges me into the responsibility for the day's news—edit and prepare and announce the 7.30 news—8.20 summary—12.30 news—1 p.m. Monitor and edit and prepare the 6.30 news. When Ev returns I will be on afternoon and evening news, plus Monitor. I think it will be good fun. After a day with Ev, I can see it's no cinch preparing a newscast. A 15 minute shot to be done properly, takes a good hour, although it can be done in less.

However this latest stunt, as far as I am concerned, is just marking time until the Navy looks me over again. If I am turned down, I will be bitterly disappointed.

By the way *Jean Christophe* which you like so much was the first novel I ever read in French. It was on our first year University course (a small part of it of course) and despite the French, I found it absorbing.

It's been excruciating agony for me to write with a pen—it takes me six times as long and the result is illegible and inarticulate. So bear in mind the

sacrifice and return the favor. And good luck in your new duties!

Sincerely,
Don.

Nov. 12, 1941, Winnipeg

Dear Jim,

Yours of the 8th ult. or inst. duly received and contents noted. Much as I hate letter-writing, it's almost a joy to sit down at a typewriter and not have to emit reptilian "commercials" on behalf of the sundry babbitts who ply their sordid trades on Portage Avenue.

From your description of your doings, I guess you're just one of those "2,000 Naval penguins" sitting on the Atlantic seaboard—about whom criticism was levelled at McDonald in parliament. He replied to it—correctly of course—that one man is required on shore for every man at sea.

I have read several of Dick's letters to his family—and he's certainly in the thick of things—torpedoes and all. He claims the Corvettes actually roll in drydock! I'm going to write him soon because I know letters look good after a month of salty discomfort.

Your mention of the momentous issues decided at mess meetings recalls the last mess meeting I attended at the W.L.I. I spoke only once—to move an adjournment (at 12.30 a.m.)—and was promptly put in my place by the Colonel, who had untold important issues still hidden up his sleeve.

If you haven't read *Delilah* yet, by Marcus Goodrich, catch hold of it some place if you can. It's the real goods—takes an honourable place alongside the best of Conrad and Melville. There is a magnificent study of a teen-aged seaman full of books and idealism who finds himself at sea with the "scum of the earth." His struggle to retain his integrity amidst this squalor is told with marvellous sympathy and understanding. Goodrich writes with the sweeping majesty of Gibbon or Thomas Wolfe—to compare two at opposite ends of Time. Yet he has a keen sense of drama, suspense, action, humour and everything else that makes up a full-blooded honest yarn. Besides, he makes you understand the why and wherefore of things naval.

Another discovery: Eric Linklater (*Juan in America—Juan in China—Poet's Pub*, etc.) A type of humor that's new to me. And he writes with a precision and irony that's (to borrow from a next-of-kin) *simply perfect!*

While I'm on books, Ted Burch's *So I said to the Colonel* is out and I'll send you a copy as soon as it appears on the stands. The cartoons by Dacre Boulton—a former Winnipegger now in Toronto—are funny as the devil. The idea of the book is to explain the army to women and others uninitiated and it succeeds very well in this purpose. The style is easy and familiar and Ted has a pretty good sense of humour—example, as I remember it: . . . “I don't think we need to deal with any ranks higher than a Colonel. There are exalted personages known as major-generals and lieut.-generals, but you aren't liable to run across them. They stick close to military institutes. Actual generals are scarce, although there are supposed to be a couple of them stuffed in the British Museum,” (a paraphrase). The book is not all in this vein, of course. He DOES explain the army—and his explanation is sensible and not in any way disparaging.

I have given notice at CJRC and am going to Toronto at the end of the month. As a matter of fact I was going on the 15th but the boss was unable to get anybody to replace me so I'm sticking around until the way is clear. Maybe I'll have better luck with the Navy in Toronto. Anyway I'm going to see this business through one way or another, and if the door is definitely closed I'll get in the army—for better for worse till death do us part and so on so forth.

What I'll do in Toronto I haven't the faintest idea but I'm sure it will be a welcome change from dribbling radio slop. Don't take the announcement of my plans as a hint for a loan. I have enough dough for a ticket and a couple of weeks board until I find a gainful occupation—which is not difficult in war-time. If I start missing any meals I'll write you pronto for a handout (Buddy—can you spare a guy a dime for a cupuvcoffee?)

Marion is busy learning how to be a wife and mother at the University “practice house”—and evenings, keeping an eye on all personable males in her territory. Mother is out of sorts at the moment—in bed with a nasty bronchial cough by doctor's orders. I think she will be O.K. in a week or so.

The latest news—which I suppose has been passed on to you—is the Woodmans' move to Winnipeg. Dorothy is delighted and so are we.

And now—back to more literary debauchery—more beguiling and honeyed words to play upon the lowest motives of our dear public. Them's bitter words—son. Such an unbusiness-like point of view for a promising young continuity writer to take.

Cheers,

Don

British United Press, Toronto
Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941

Dear Jim,

Arrived here on Monday last and start work with the British United Press tomorrow, on a “month’s trial basis.” I was lucky to get something so soon, as my financial position was—to use a euphemism—“uncertain.”

However, the news has just flashed through that Japan has attacked Pearl Harbor and Manila. What will happen in the next week is anyone’s guess. I might be called back to the W.L.I. in service. That would be O.K. with me because the Navy situation in Toronto is even worse than Winnipeg. They will not require any more cadet-officers until next OCTOBER—almost a year from now. The recruiting officer offered to take me on in a few days as a “coder”—ordinary seaman rank. I would be sent to headquarters at Ottawa and seated at a desk, I presume, “for the duration.” Killed in action by an Ottawa bus is not my idea of living the more abundant life. I am thinking it over—but I have practically made up my mind to wait and see for a bit and enjoy the novelty of a new job and a new city. Naturally, I am just on leave from the W.L.I. and will eventually have to attach myself to a reserve army unit in Toronto. So it looks like the army for yours truly.

Have been dined by two Winnipeggers—Scott Young and his wife and Hughie Newton and his wife—I should have said FOUR Winnipeggers. Scott is with the Canadian Press and Hugh is here with the BUP. Was also beered by Clem Shields, who is doing a very good job with the Evening Telegram.

Toronto has a goodly number of former Winnipeggers who have reversed the Horace Greeley maxim. There is a possibility that I may be sent to Montreal after a few months here.

This is more in the nature of a hurried news bulletin than a letter, but I’ll write you at leisure in the near future—if I manage to find any leisure.

Best of everything,

Don

P.S. The news is really popping now.

Dec. 11, 1941, Toronto

Dear Folks,

It is now 2.30 a.m. and I am whiling away the midnight hours until 9 a.m. when I am through work. This is the “dog-watch”—instituted when Japan went to bat—24-hour service to our radio station clients. I haven’t much to do on this shift—it’s really only a matter of having someone on the job in case anything breaks. And I think it will last only a week or do so.

Well the news is certainly upsetting. I am hoping it will speed things up a bit with the Navy but my hopes are small. In the near future, I think you will find me in the army—if I can get in with my rank among these “superior” easterners.

I must look up Alec, Beth and Helen sometime this week. I met Hon. Harry Nixon yesterday—professionally and socially. A colleague of mine showed me around the provincial legislature and I took that opportunity of saying hello to Mr. Nixon. In this business it is wise to seize every opportunity of meeting the “big shots.” He was very decent—invited me to his home any weekend I chose—and appeared very broken up about the loss of his son.

Would you consider sending me a two months’ subscription to the *Free Press* as a Christmas present? I like to know what Winnipeggers are doing in service—casualties, etc., and the Toronto papers devote about one square inch to the west. I wouldn’t send a subscription for any longer than two months since my plans are very uncertain.

Please don’t expect much for Christmas. Even stamps deflate my paltry earning. Hope to touch up the BUP for more dough in a couple of months. I am eating all my meals out and that’s where it hurts most.

Thanks for your very welcome letter, Mother. All letters are very welcome . . . Well, I think I’ll slip out of this noisy, lonely little office for a spot of toast and coffee. Toronto is a ghost town after midnight and I’ll have to walk two blocks to find a cafe open for business.

Love,

Don

December 16, 1941, Toronto

Dear Folks,

Tonight I’m off to Montreal—which will be my headquarters from now on. I was told yesterday to catch the first train. However, I had to wait for my pass, which gave me a day of respite.

Mother—just got your letter this morning. About my address, you'd better make it BUP, 231 St. James Street, Montreal, for the time being.

The way things are going on both hemispheres of the world I think I'll be getting myself into service in the near future. I'll give the Navy a try in Montreal but my hopes are slim. I'm afraid it will have to be the blasted army.

I looked up the relatives last night. Dined with Alec, Beth and Helen and dropped in on Agnes on the way home. It was nice seeing them all. Everyone is well, although I think Agnes suffers a lot with her arthritis.

Warren Carleton will be on the train with me to Montreal and we are counting on having a little fun. He is "dead-heading" it to Halifax, and then back to Winnipeg. Dead-heading means travelling free to Halifax and then working his way back in the kitchen. Naturally, he is as poor as a church-mouse, because he is studying for his Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. A good fellow.

And so it's goodbye to Toronto—for a while anyway. Wait till I tell my landlady. She'll be mad because she wanted to rent the room on a permanent basis and I told her it was very unlikely that I would be transferred.

Dad—your razor-blades are holding out magnificently. I shall probably be using them in England, Singapore, or Vancouver before the box runs out.

Mother—glad you are fully recovered. Take life easy. Helen, Agnes, Beth, Alec, Shirley Anne give you and Dad their love and so on.

Love,

Don

24 Dec., 1941, Montreal

[Don and Dorothy were keen on the "Hyman Kaplan"
dialect stories from the New Yorker Magazine]

Dear Dorthy,

Chust god your nize Chrissmus prasz. Pajams—iss vondervol. Hopink you forgiv for openink before Chrissmus-time? Yes? Pajams—chust vod I needink. Mine pajams iss all kinds doity—fulluv holes ant nesty-like. Tenks vunce more for pajams. Wondervol. How iss Voody—ant Nancy—and Juty. Iss vishink dem Merry Chrissmusses. Hopink you hev gutime too—ant nod eet too many tirkeys. Your Chrissmuss prasz meks me all kinds heppy.

lovings ant kissinks,

Don

S.P. How iss new houze? Nize? Beeg?

28 Dec., 1941, Montreal

Dear Jim,

Just a note to thank you for the Christmas cheer.

The New Yorker Album gave me many fine laughs. I read it the night I got it in a St. Catherine's Street Cafe and a lot of the coffee and beer sippers must have thought I was nuts.

Just got a note from home and was told you phoned home on Christmas—which tickled them all no end. I sent home a "Christmas box" of various odds and ends and wired Mother some flowers. So I think they had a pretty fair Christmas of it as far as we were concerned.

I think I told you that the Navy will have none of me here. It looked alright until the Captain got suspicious about my eyes. And then out I went after a test. So after the New Year, I'll be investigating the Army here.

My work is interesting, and good training—if somewhat hard on the nerves. I hear Pat Murray and George Ford are engaged. An excellent union, methinks. Hope you are managing to triumph over the ennui of "the service." That's what I am afraid of in the Army—and besides I am the damndest soldier that ever ported arms. Well, cheers from Montreal—I have several "must" letters to write.

Don

Dec. 30th, 1941, Montreal

Dear Folks,

And now to reply to several letters in "one fell swoop." Dad and Mother—I got your letters yesterday. And also another one from Mother earlier in the week. And Marion's too. I'm glad my miserable little gifts were so well-received. And let me in turn thank you all for a most excellent Christmas package. It got here on time alright—Christmas Eve. And when I wrote you last I hadn't opened it. And such useful items too—shirts, socks, hanks, ties—and even TOOTHPASTE! But to what conceivable use can I put safety pins?

I spent a fair Christmas—interfered with by work. John Hamilton and I drank a few “deaths on wheels” (rye, sauterne and ginger ale) on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. Then we adjourned to the “Aux Delices,” a French restaurant, and ate a fine Christmas dinner, aided and abetted by a bottle of table wine. Then, feeling comfortable and relaxed, I had to bustle down to the office for an eight-hour shift. Christmas day was just another work-day. But I get all of New Year’s Eve from 12.30 the previous night—and most of New Year’s Day—which is something.

John and I had dinner Sunday night with Birt Briggs and his wife. And we spent the evening listening to Birt on the piano and playing records. He is a former Free Press Winniepegger—now with the Star in Montreal.

Landladies are loathsome creatures on the whole. I am always getting into trouble with mine for forgetting to turn off the lights or borrowing her soap or making a noise at night or something.

But now I’m in a lovely spot. Hamilton and I decided to take a room together and save money—live a Mr. Cox and Mr. Box existence because we work different shifts. So we both gave our landladies notice. Now we have to move in a couple of days and the landlady with whom we had reserved a room has gone and rented it to someone else. So I guess we’ll have to bunk in a hotel for a few days.

I think I told you the Navy turned me down here. Everything looked alright for a while, but they finally got me on eyes. So I’ll be investigating the Army set-up shortly after the New Year.

I’m glad to hear you talked to Jim on Christmas. He sent me a Christmas wire and a book of selected New Yorker cartoons. I had sent him a book earlier.

Marion—thanks for the socks. And I hope yours fit. And thanks also for the letter. Aunt Lou—many thanks for your cheering Christmas card. I’m afraid I left you out in my Christmas box. But you can consider yourself one of the family as far as my letters home are concerned.

Well, I can’t think of anything more at the moment. My shift is over. John has taken over the radio wire and we have the office to ourselves. So I shall go uptown shortly—blow myself to a mighty meal—and crawl away to my little den for a spot of sleep.

And all is well on the Montreal front.

Love,

Don

Jan., 1942, Montreal

Dear Mother et al,

It is Sunday—four o'clock—and I am sitting in a cold room listening to the radio. If this room had a couple of bottles of milk on the floor and a few shelves on the walls I am sure you would immediately mistake it for a refrigerator.

At present, Hamilton and I are living Mr. Cox and Mr. Box style. Unfortunately, from time to time Mr. Cox and Mr. Box decide to go to bed at the same time—and the result is a marvel of discomfort. We shan't stay here long for a multitude of reasons. One of them is that the landlady is addicted to the bottle, and seldom gets around to do any tidying up. And two untidier creatures than John D. Hamilton and D. A. Duncan could not be found between Vancouver and Halifax.

We have been looking for a small suite but to date one isn't to be found in the fair village of Montreal. In the meantime we are economizing in cool domestic misery. Only our sense of humor saves us from abysmal depths of self-commiseration. My pay is upped five a week on the 24th of this month, which will ease the financial burden and permit me to live a trifle more luxuriously.

I had a nice letter from the boss at CJRC thanking me for a Christmas card. He is planning to be in Montreal this month and said he would look me up. Incidentally he gave me a very fine recommendation which I have not had occasion to use—but which is useful to have.

The work here is hard—but interesting. I don't mind the night work half as much as I did at the Free Press, because I am my own boss on the radio wire and the hours are more or less regular.

By the way, is your trip East still on? And if so will you hit Montreal? If you can't make it, I expect I'll have a chance to get home when I get in the Army.

I enjoy your letters—even though I know I always forget to tell you half the things you want to know when I write.

So please keep up the good work,

And love to all,

Don

Jan. 15, 1942, Montreal

Dear Jim,

First to acknowledge your letter, your note, and—the world is so full of a number of things—your CHEQUE.

My first intention was to return it with my kindest thanks. Because I don't need it—that is for food, shelter or raiment. But on second thought (second thoughts come very easily in the presence of a cheque) I have decided to hang on to it in case of an "emergency."

But let me tell you I don't deserve it. Instead of conserving my money for the necessities, I waste much of it on such unnecessaries as gramophone records for the combination, in which I sank my last dough after hitting Toronto, expensive meals and the odd book.

If I enlist in one of the services as an officer in the near future, I'll send the cheque back. In the meantime, it won't be cashed, in case you want the dough yourself. But if I enlist as a buck, I should consider that a state of financial emergency, and will probably keep the cheque to keep me in cigarettes and soap for the duration. So for what must be about the nth time—thanks to J. L. Well, I am very weary. So enough for now.

By the way, have you read "*The Web and the Rock*"? If not, I'll send it to you. It's full of the best and the worst of Wolfe. Much pure gold but also much beating of the knuckles against the wall, peering into a million faces, stamping the million-footed pavements, and ranting against the faceless ciphers on the streets.

Cheers,

Don

N.B. If you get that leave, I hope you can make Montreal.

Jan. 16th, 1942, Montreal

Dear Mother,

Received your dope to-day on Bette's billowing bosom. I wrote Roy and told him a little bird told me all about it. So you or Dorothy will probably be in for a scolding from him.

All is well on the Montreal front. I don't consider myself permanently settled as yet. This Mr. Cox and Mr. Box business is amiable and less expensive; but I have to sleep part of the night with Hamilton which is damned uncomfortable. Next time you see Irv tell him he'd better not come

near me flaunting his two hundred and two pounds of blubber, because I could count the decent meals I've had since I left home on the fingers of one hand. I'm going to investigate the Army next week—so may have more to tell you then.

Cheers,

Don.

Marion—What's all this about rats and brothers?

There's only one rat in our family—and she's got a pretty face and a scatter-brain. You'd better pay more attention to rats in your nutrition lectures in future, because if we lose this war, we're going to be governed by them. John D. was grateful for your excluding him from your cracks at sportswriters. Have you met any more "cute" boys of late? Or is it just the usual run of goons, idiots, dolts, morons, saps, and crackpots?

Love,

Don

Jan. 22, 1942, Montreal

Dear Dorthy:

Tenks hondert times for brurifull boitday cart. Voz vonderful nize and meks me all kints heppiness.

So Nancy is valking—ant ronnink aroud ant makink jomp? No? Dat vood mek me for laffink till tears iss comink into da eyess.

Iss tired to-night. Much vorkink met der conscripshun talkink in hottava. Makinzee Kink meking all kints too much vork for yus trooly. Iss goink to bet for beeg sleepink,

Your loving bruder,

D-O-N-A-L-D

So much for Hyman Kaplan. The truth is I am too damned tired to write much of a letter, having just wound up nine strenuous hours on the radio wire. Hughie Newton late of Winnipeg and later of Toronto, has been moved to the Montreal Office, which makes a total now of three Winnipeggers showing the east how to handle a news agency. Hughie's wife is Tannis Thompson—Matt Thompson's daughter, and a very swell little kid.

I think I'll be grabbing a uniform of some sort within the next month—in which case I might get a chance to buzz home for a leave. All is well in Montreal—much work and night work at that—which I loathe. However you've got to do your share of the unpleasanter shifts. How is Bette's bosom coming along? I wrote Roy and told him I heard about the impending event from an "unimpeachable source." So he'll probably scold you for telling me. I think—from a letter from Irv—that Irv's a bit jealous about Roy's impending fatherhood. And he'll probably make strenuous and exhausting efforts to follow suit. And so to a good meal at the "Chicken-Coop"—perhaps a bottle of beer at the "Cadillac"—and then to bed.

The best to you, Woody, and the little gnomes.

Don.

P.S.—Glad you found a good house. I'm still looking for adequate shelter. The trouble is I'm just too lazy to really look—and go on, living in the rabbit warren I share with John Hamilton.

Jan. 22, 1942, Montreal

Dear Mother;

Thank you all for remembering me so faithfully on my birthday . . . and that includes dear Aunt Lulu. This will probably be worse than no letter at all, because I am very tired after a strenuous shift on the radio wire—conscripted, Hong Kong, etc.

John and I are still living in our amazing hen-roost. I haven't bothered about moving because at any moment I expect I shall don the khaki—and my quarters thenceforth will be chosen without my approval or disapproval.

Hugh Newton, of Toronto, has been transferred here—which makes three Winnipeggers in the Montreal office. Curiously, Hugh left CJRC shortly after I started there. Then I caught up with him at Toronto with the BUP. Now he has caught up with me again here in Montreal. Your dollar birthday gift, Mother, I spent exactly as you suggested—on a meal. And an excellent one at that. I have a cold which puts me out of the mood for writing. So cheerio until I feel a bit more loquacious.

Love,

Don

Jan. 28th, 1942, Montreal

Dear Folks,

Again I am rather tired. So again this will probably prove a rather short letter.

I feel slightly depressed tonight—about this army business. It seems they are looking for French-Canadian officers in infantry units. The only unit I see much chance of getting in with my rank is the Sixth Hussars—or Hissers or something—which is an Armoured unit. I can't even drive a car without hitting something every once in a while, let alone drive a blasted tank. But I'll have to make up my mind about something pretty soon.

Dad—thanks for the very readable book. I have started it already and it certainly gives a little-known picture of the Nasties in their lighter mood.

Here's a funny circumstance in connection with my love life. I met a girl for whom I took rather a fancy and asked her over to our Cox and Box residence one Sunday afternoon to hear some records. John Hamilton met her and promptly asked her out before he had talked to her for more than fifteen minutes—which naturally I found rather disconcerting. But a hitch occurred. She didn't turn up in time for the date. Hamilton—figuring he had been “stood up”—left her a very indignant note. The result—she won't have anything to do with EITHER of us any more.

Mother—you are a bit of a rambler. You mix up a piece of most important news with a completely inconsequential item. Witness:

“I am looking forward to seeing you in about two weeks. Dad has green onions planted in flower pots in the cellar . . .”

I take it to mean you are coming down east. I'll do my best to wine and dine you royally. By the way, if it wouldn't be too much trouble to bring my army stuff along with you, please do so. If I enlist in the ranks, I can sell it—otherwise I will need it—when, I cannot say.

Well, goodbye for now,
Love to all,
Don

Feb. 7, 1942, Montreal

Dear Jim,

I haven't tested myself on the latest Navy eyesight edict. I'm afraid I have become a bit of a defeatist on that score. But I shall accost Commander Earle on the subject next week.

Meanwhile, I have been investigating the army set-up without much success. I am not fussy about giving up my rank which cost me so many hours of painful boredom with the W.L.I. But working nights I can't complete my qualifications with any reserve unit. What I am angling for is a chance to go on active service direct—that is to the officers' training school at Brockville. The only reason I think I'd like to have a little responsibility on service is that otherwise I fear I might degenerate spiritually and mentally in short order. Meanwhile, editing the war seems to be a fantastically ludicrous job to be doing at present. But it's certainly fun.

Continued next week.

Don

12 Feb., 1942, Montreal

Dear Derty, Nency and leetle Juty.

Soch a small ladders iss you sandink me! So small it gets lost in der ladder-box in mine offuss and I dont fint till many days alraddy iss gon by. Choost fint der ladder today ant is mekink me all kints heppy vunce more.

Soch doity tinks you vas writink your brudder! My! Iss mekink me all kints shamtness. Spikink about badclothos—ant beggypents! So vy are you wridink does tinks. Iss not nize. My! Shakesbeer wouldnt be tallink doze tinks. He is a poyet—grate wrider.

All kints hart workint here tonite. Lecshuns—you know—votink ant pipul goink to tall vat dey tink about plabashit. Meenan is defate. Meechul and Saint Lorent iss elekt. All kints workingk tolink about. Momma ant pappa iss comink to Franch city soon. No? Nize to see dem vunco more. Now muss go eatink and slapink becoz iss much tirednez. Iss andink ladder now.

Yur lovink brudder, with meny kissinks.

D-O-N-A-L-D

It's true. Your teeny letter did get lost for about a week. By the way, Roy DID tell me all about the impending multiplication in his family. He sent me a wedding picture for a Christmas present which I did not find until near the end of January. In the picture was enclosed an announcement of the forthcoming event. Naturally, he was puzzled that I didn't acknowledge the

picture or the information. However the whole thing has been straightened out now.

The best to you, Woody and the elves.

Don

(?) Feb., 1942, Montreal

Dear Acting Lieutenant Commander,

Or should it be Acting Paymaster Lieutenant Commander—or Acting Lieutenant Commander Paymaster? One must be careful how one addresses a naval brass hat. Congratulations on gaining a stripe and—according to Mother—losing your friends! You will soon look as though you are sporting a couple of pet chipmunks.

It was nice seeing the folks again, although I am afraid I disgraced myself by sleeping in on them and hating to be phoned for a dinner date. Mother and I had a good long chat on her way back. My views on marriage have mellowed since I left home. I think a wife would be a good investment solely for the returns in housekeeping and cookery.

(Several hours later)

I became bogged down with work, so am finishing this letter in the rabbit-warren on John D's typewriter.

John and I just had a long argument over a beer on T. E. Lawrence, and I am referring the issue to you for arbitrament. Here is the point: John contends that Lawrence was in the employ of the British Secret Service while he was in the Tank Corps and the Air Force. John's theory, in brief, is that the coup d'état in Afghanistan around 1926 could only have been carried out by Lawrence, from the point of view of brilliant strategy. I summoned all the evidence to disprove that—but was still unable to convince him. Can you furnish any documentary proof?

(The next day)

I decided I needed sleep. So here goes again.

I am listening to the third movement of Tchaikowsky's Fifth which I borrowed from Birt Briggs (formerly W. Free P. and now Montreal Star), while John is deep in Clifton Fadiman's *Reading I've Liked*. And it is a peaceful Sunday in the Copping establishment.

The Navy says the new eye directive does not change my status but I'm going to have another test on Monday.

Regards and Congrats again on promotion and new job.

Don

(?) March, 1942, Montreal

Dear Paymistress,

Just to start off right, here is a whopper of a mistake I pulled on the radio wire tonight, but it carries an implication of delicious satire. Quote: "Ottawa—the plebiscite bill is nearing the last lap in its long journey through parliament. And indications are that voting will be held in the middle of May." (Voting of course—at the polls—not on the bill.) One gets bogged down once in a while when things pile up.

John and I, incidentally, have evacuated the Copping dugout and taken up a more strategic position in another salient—one street over. We have ascended from the area of destitution to the region of genteel poverty. As a matter of fact our room is tops—large, airy, one double bed and one single, spotless linen and bedclothes, H. & C. W. (to quote the want ad.), shower in handy bathroom, excellent service. So I won't have to get married to make life tolerable after all.

I broached the Navy on the strength of your memo on eyesight. They kindly volunteered to give me another test and politely failed me again. Curiously enough, I seem to be having a hard time getting into the Army. Everywhere I go they have long lists of officers waiting for calls. So unless I duck into the ranks, I'll probably have to wait some time. The W.L.I. advises me they can't place me on active service unless I am in Winnipeg. So I am still more or less marking time.

Our prime minister is certainly a far-sighted man. He has actually declared that Canadian troops will be drafted to defend Canada's outposts if they are invaded. Fancy such a pugnacious attitude on the part of our gentle war-time prime minister.

Thanks for the snap. You look quite normal about the gills but you seem to be holding on that rail pretty tight. And congratulations on your typing. You appear to be doing nobly. I may look up that nurse if I can find the letter in which you mentioned her name and address. Is she—to borrow from Marion—"cute." Or is she a "goon."

My last date was with one of JDH's French-Canadian finds. His girl spoke English but the turnip he supplied for me couldn't. So our conversation (in French) went something like this.

she: and do you like your work?

me: all yes, it's much interessant. And where work you?

she: I don't work.

me: ah, very interessant. It makes cold, no?

she: yes, very cold.

me: have you a hunger or wish you to watch a cinema? etc. etc.

Well, cheers for now.

Don

P.S. Had to get a new envelope to get your damn title on it, and I left some out.

5 March, 1942, Montreal

Dear Nancy,

Vat am I hearink boud you? You vass leffink boud mine ladders, no? Shudnt be leffink like dat becoss I am makink leetle mistiks in der spallink. Abraham Lincohen is makingk all kints mistiks in der spalink and iss grate man alrady yet enyhow. So iss no more leffinks, Nancy. Or is mekink me engry ant shamednuss.

Nancy. Tall me vat iss all dese plebishit about? Everabody iss talkink boud plebishit. Meks mine had go round in spinninks. Juty beink all kind nize leetle girl? Hopink yes but if no givs spenkinks. Iss anding now to wride Dorthy.

Affexshunadely,
D-O-N

Dorothy,

Delighted to get your notes, written I gather between moments of domestic exasperation. Jim's promotion is swell. The Navy, incidentally, turned me down yesterday on my fourth eye-test. So it will be the Army pretty soon, but they don't seem to be in very sore need of officers around these parts. Everybody wants to be an officer in this war.

John and I are moved and have a very comfortable room—big, roomy, and clean—a great improvement over the mad-house we inhabited. Hope all goes well with you, the nippers and the Master.

Love,

Don

P.S. Just got your letter of Feb. 28, in which you called me a “pet.” I felt like wagging my tail! menytenks.

March 13, 1942, Montreal

Dear Mother,

Just a note to let you know all goes well with me in Montreal. John and I are very pleased with our new quarters. Despite the fact that we are just as sloppy as ever before, the service is excellent and the maid doesn't seem to mind tidying our room. Just received a carbon copy of Jim's letter to you, which is indeed a novel way of corresponding. Every once in a while I get a letter marked O.H.M.S. His Majesty's Ship etc., which contains nothing but a cartoon from the New Yorker. Damn this typewriter of John's, the “W” is not working and every time I hit one I have to stop and put it back on the keyboard—very slow going.

I am doing a little dickering with the R.C.A.S.C. here (I'll let you try and figure that one out) and may be able to get on active service with them next month. However there's nothing definite as yet.

“Jack's” just arrived with my morning toast and coffee, which is very cheering since I am good for nothing but snarls until coffee opens my eyes in the morning. Incidentally my radio is blaring away at me in French over my shoulder, which is rather distracting—so off it goes. That should hold you Frenchie!

Hope you got a kick out of our little confab over the WINNIPEG newswire. Makes it seem as if we aren't so far apart after all, doesn't it? Convey my apologies to Marion for my forgetting her birthday—which she must have known I would forget anyway. Enclosed a dollar for her to ease my conscience. Trust you duly received the nuts I sent you (no commentary on your intelligence intended). In case you underestimate the gift, nuts have gone up 75 per cent in price in the past year! And so folks to another letter, a shave, a bath and to work. This letter would have been longer except for the “W”.

Cheers,

Don

Note—This is not an important communication. I just sent it airmail for the heck of it.

13 March, 1942, Montreal

Dear Jim,

Am duty-bound to reply to several letters, so might as well waste a line or two on you. It tickles my fancy to get a pompous-looking brown envelope On His Majesty's Service containing nothing more than a bit of absurdity from the New Yorker. In return I am enclosing some humorabilia from the same very estimable magazine.

Am dickering with the Army Service Corps here. The O.C. is not sure whether any more officer drafts will be required or not. There is to be a meeting in Ottawa, etc., etc., so red tape still stands between me and Hitler. In the meantime I am carrying on the joyless burden of night radio editor and catching owlsh glimpses of daylight in the early afternoon.

By the way, my income tax will have to be attended to in the near future. I think the easiest way out would be to send the whole damn thing to the New Yorker's Department of Utter Confusion. There are three courses open to me: 1. Ignore it. 2. Cash your check and pay you back in instalments—at, let us say—a “humane” rate of interest. 3. Borrow the money from a bank—which Ogden Nash tell us—never lends money to anybody who actually NEEDS it.

I doubt if I would got a very sympathetic hearing from a bank, judging from the air of grave suspicion that greets me every time I venture to cash my pay-check. However if I get in the Army before the dead-line arrives, I shall ignore it completely and let the federal agents come and get me. So now to another letter. When do you get that leave to Montreal?

Regards,

Don

P.S. John bowed gracefully to superior authority on T.E.L.

P.S. 2. Note my spelling of “Saint John”—it's correctern yurs.

March 17, 1942, Montreal

Dear Dorthy,

Iss short ladders becoss I hev meny pipples to wride to and guverenmunts at oddawa has sad shortagus papers. Onnerstand? War iss all kints bad—no papers for wridink and now iss no more deliverink so much from da grossry stores. My! Iss hidlert causink unplasantrnasses. Soch a fallow I hav naver dramt of in horrabel nidemares. Besides hidlert, messoloony iss nize fallow.

Mapee I fide in da army very soon, but is meny rad tape troubles gettink commishun. So I am “darlink” agan. My. Soch kintnesses iss yon showerink on me. Dont daserf. Meks me shamednuss soch nize tinks you vas tallink me. Batter talling Nancy she iss chust as cude as Juty—cuder maypee—efen high cless. Pliss dont be callink me “pat” at and of your ladders. Maypee you min nize perheps. But iss not en enimel.

So iss sayink goodpye, ant anding the ladder.

Lufflingly,

D-O-N-A-L-D

Peeass. Rid Jakesbeer! My! Iss grate poyett!!!

1 April, 1942, Montreal

Dear Mother et all:

A thousand and one pardons for my dereliction of duty as a correspondent. As a matter of fact I have been so worried about my difficulties getting established in the Army that I haven't felt I had anything to tell you—and I still haven't.

The W.L.I. have been mobilized but I haven't heard anything from them. I wrote them today asking if they could find a place for me—but I am rather doubtful. In the first place I am not fully qualified. In the second place I am in Montreal. In the third place, I understand their first slate of officers will be made up of men already on active service plus some from overseas and other units.

Meanwhile my application is still in here for the Army Service Corps, but there is nothing to report. I have decided that if I can't get on as a cadet officer before the end of the month I am going to enlist in the ranks. I would probably like it better anyway. Please don't send any advice on that score—well-meant as I know it would be—because I am feeling uncomfortable enough as it is.

Now that I have poured out my woes I can afford to be a little more cheerful and let's hope a little more newsy. John D. H. and I are still

inhabiting our cozy little den on Victoria St.—which, thanks to an efficient maid—is reasonably tidy for at least a couple of hours every day.

Give my kindest wishes for a speedy return to enduring health to Agnes. Pretty tough for her with a husband overseas and aching limbs at home. This is a lousy letter. I'll write you again, maybe tomorrow or the next day to make amends.

Cheers

Don.

P.S. Tell Nancy I write her about the menpower moblezachuns next ladder.—D-O-N.

“Is it an important telegram?”

“No,” Mr. Grogan replied, “It is most unimportant. Business. The accumulating of money . . .”—“The Human Comedy.”

1 April, 1942, Montreal

Dear Jim;

I have cashed your check—paid my income tax (thank God for Wiggins Systems salary) and returned the balance to your account in Winnipeg. I will pay you back in instalments of varying size, ranging anywhere from the small to the infinitesimal.

It was nice to have that check around until it turned itself into bills. The first day I turned up at the office I lost seven dollars of it in loans. SO FOR MY PROTECTION against (this typewriter has unpredictable habits) the BUP wolves, I think it is in safer keeping in Winnipeg. I also have a hole in my pocket out of which I have already lost two dollars, and out of which I expect to lose more until I get it sewn. The borrowing situation is bad. There's no use saying you are broke if you aren't, because sooner or later you will be caught with a bill in your hand buying a package of cigarettes. After that, all argument is futile.

Bev. Owen is the worst. He was formerly Canadian editor of *Liberty* until he split with the American editorial board over policy and quit. He came to the BUP, naturally at a greatly diminished salary. Living here, he still is maintaining a house in Toronto, and paying income tax on part of the money he earned from *Liberty*. So you've got to watch out for him. The other day he came to me with a worried look. “Don,” he said, “I owe you two dollars don't I?” “Why yes Bev,” I replied, brightening at the prospect

of a prompt repayment, “No hurry of course if things are going tough with you.” Came the reply, “Well, as a matter of fact I was wondering if you could stretch it by another couple of bucks until next Thursday.” And so it goes. But I don’t imply of course that I never borrow myself. Bev. incidentally is a swell fellow. Middle aged, handsome, captain in the Imperials in the Great War, conservative in tastes and thoughts, and an astonishing mine of sound information on Canadian Parliamentary affairs, as well as the world picture in general. He’s disliked by a couple of young Horace Greeleys over whom he was made day news editor—perhaps because he is careless of secondary news stories and indifferent to sport. His curious, pseudo-academic hockey leads are a marvel.

I have decided to join something or other in the ranks at the end of April, if nothing comes of my application for a commission in the Army Service Corps.

Hugh Newton (now in Ottawa), Hamilton and I drank beer long into the night last Saturday (the first I’ve had off), and came to the inevitable conclusion most newspaper people come to before what Hamilton terms the “slow stain of life” rubs out the last spark of idealism. That conclusion is—stick your finger into a small weekly newspaper where you have at least a measure of independence. There is a post-war thought for you and I—if there are any newspapers after the war in Canada—and if there *is* any Canada. You supply the capital (yeah—me and who else!) plus a potential editorial skill and the magic gift of writing . . . and business acumen. I’ll supply my advertising and newspaper experience plus fifty thousand dollars worth of goodwill.

The result: The Bilgewater Bugle, (Western Canada’s fastest growing weekly newspaper). Circulation—last week 252; this week 253. Pay-Lt-Comdr. J. L. Duncan, President, Editor in Chief, General Manager. Pvt. D. A. Duncan, news editor, sports editor, features editor, advertising sales manager, sales manager, circulation, special correspondent, copy boy and janitor. Assets—the President, the News Editor and the circulation. Liabilities—the President, the News Editor and the unpaid circulation. Editorial policy; the Party in Power—right or wrong. Advertising policy; let your conscience be your judge. (Double rates for cancer cures and sex thrill literature.) Masthead; For a Bigger, more Beautiful more Bountiful, Bilgewater.

Cheers

Don

April 2nd, 1942, Montreal

Dear Folks,

Well, here comes that follow-up on my last letter. Nothing of note has happened since the last letter. No word from the W.L.I. so I am still betwixt and between as far as the Army is concerned. However I feel justified in waiting for another few weeks in view of the fact that I've offered my services about six times.

I followed Dad's example with respect to income tax. I just walked into the bureau and told one of the clerks I would willingly fill in my name, address, religion, and breeding if he would consent to fill in all the spaces reserved for figures. He agreed, told me what I owed, and everything was as simple as apple pie.

For your information, I am a model of tidiness compared to John D. Hamilton. He drops cigarette ashes on our fine rug with magnificent unconcern. And a trail of litter follows his progress around the room like the wake behind a tramp steamer. Never mind, John's a good egg. I am sloppy, too, and the maid is marvellously efficient.

Best to all and I'll write again soon.

Don.

11 May, 1942, Montreal, Quebec

Mrs. R. C. Duncan
75 Canora St., Winnipeg.

Warmest Mother's day sentiments flowers on pay day cheers

Don

11 May, 1942, Montreal

Dear Mother and Folks:

I think I owe about a dozen letters and the thought of answering them all has more or less appalled me. As a matter of fact I have been very busy for the past two weeks. Our radio editor has been in Winnipeg, and I have been on the day radio wire with innumerable other office routine matters to worry about. So I have been only working, eating, and sleeping.

I intended leaving at the end of the month, taking a week's holiday and joining the Army. However I may have to stay on an extra couple of weeks to save enough dough for that holiday which I feel I need. I am still toying

with the idea of taking that holiday in Winnipeg on the waters washing the shore of Sandy Hook. I'll let you know in good time if I can manage it.

Mother. Would you be good enough to get me a gift of something or other for Mr. and Mrs. George Ford? I won't be able to pay you back for two or three weeks. Nothing I would like better at the moment than to help Dad pile wood at Sandy Hook (for about ten minutes a day) and spend the rest of the time in the sailboat.

There have been several changes around in the bureau lately and the Winnipeg clique—Duncan—Hamilton—Newton—is currently bearing much of the load. And we have a pretty fair time together.

Mother—Doug Simpson told me about convoying you safely by the menace of an ill tempered canine. I think he should be awarded the D.S.C. for his gallantry on the high streets of Winnipeg. Just been busy helping Newton with some things that cropped up here. (This is my day off but you can never be sure of being completely off.) Am wiring home a little Mother's Day remembrance which I hope you will like. And will try to improve my correspondence.

Cheers to all,
Don.

(?) May, 1942, Montreal

Dear Loot;

This is just a paragraph to acknowledge your invitation. I may manage it. Here's the situation. I am leaving BUP either at the end of the month or June 15th—depends on whether the army service corps has anything for me that would be worth while waiting for. Otherwise I plan on taking a week or so holidays and then climbing into some manner of uniform.

The week's holiday is contingent on finances. I think I can make it if I am frugal for a while. Saint John might be as good a spot as any to holiday in if I could get a pass. And I think that could be arranged. Family ties draw me toward Winnipeg. And still others to a week's sailing on the St. Lawrence—if there is room for a sailboat between the submarines loitering around.

So you see I don't know "wotell" the score is. Incidentally how is the housing situation at Saint John? Your bed would obviously not accommodate two six-footers.

I'll let you know before the month end. This is a very slap dash letter. Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Newton are plaguing me here to adjourn for a pint of bitters. Which I need. Work has been piled on endlessly lately with our radio editor off in Winnipeg.

Cheers,

Don.

18th May, 1942, Montreal

Dear Folks:

After having offered my services twice to the Navy, and about a dozen times to the Army, I have the happy privilege of being drafted.

However in view of my commission in the W.L.I., I think I can have it postponed until I join something myself. As a matter of fact I was going to leave for Saint John at the end of the month, have a holiday with J.L. and join up there. But in view of this call up, which may involve red-tape, I think I will leave for Winnipeg on Saturday, holiday for a week or so at Sandy Hook and then join up.

Incidentally, who should drop into the office to-day but Mrs. J. R. Murray who has taken to flying about the country. Some girl! If she can manage it, we will have a bit of lunch together tomorrow.

My leaving on Saturday—still a bit doubtful—is leaving the office in a hell of a mess. Hugh Newton is also trying to get away then to Winnipeg on his holidays. The bureau manager is nearly going nuts. So am I for that matter, with the amount of work that has been piled on to me lately.

Well, I'll let you know later in the week if it's definite. Better tell Woodman to have the sailboat in shape for me. If it is still in drydock, somebody's head will fall. Tell Marion I'll tell her that letter personally when I arrive home.

Regards

Don.

21st May, 1942, Montreal

Dear Jim;

Events have intervened to more or less make up my mind for me. I received a call from M.D. 10 a few days ago for compulsory service. I understand I am not subject to call while an officer with a reserve unit but I

deem it wiser to go back to Winnipeg and get the thing straightened out. So I am leaving on Monday next with Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Newton. Hugh is taking his holidays and will then fill in at the Winnipeg bureau for a few weeks.

War or no war, I am completely worn out from the amount of work piled on me here in the last few weeks, and am going to get a week's sailing if I have to go to jail for it. Then, if there's anything available in the commissioned ranks in Winnipeg, I'll take it—if not, join something as a private. It's damned irritating to get a call when I have a half a dozen applications for service gathering redtape in Montreal. I suppose it's my own fault for procrastinating while trying to get in the Navy.

The form is only a request to report for a medical—which I have already done and advises to notify the divisional registrar if a member of a reserve unit. The invite to Saint John will have to wait a bit I'm afraid—and to my regret.

Guedella's *Churchill* which you so kindly sent me, is in the hands of a stranger—probably an illiterate one. Last seen in the Cadillac cafe. So I'll buy a copy in Winnipeg and send it on to the elder Poole. Such a poison I 'em! I expect my next letter will be full of complaints about sore feet, unspeakable rising hours and tender-minded sergeants.

Don.

The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular set of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls; in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.—Shaw's "Pygmalion."

June 13th, 1942, Sandy Hook

[To Peter Duncan Watson]

Dear Peter Duncan:

I am just a little annoyed at you for having chosen to enter this world when your father was at Sandy Hook. You needn't have been so impatient; you will be here long enough to get into all the mischief you may have planned. However I will forgive your error on account of your age. After all, one can't be tactful at the age of seven days.

Now about that second name of yours. Probably you are not aware of it, but that name you bear carries with it a grave responsibility. You must inherit the Duncan tradition. That means you must not be too practical or too conventional. You must never earn too much money—nor save any part of it. Unless of course you someday may want to buy a sailboat. In which case you have my permission to earn as much money as you like in order to have it.

You must be a little eccentric, a trifle absent-minded—not crazy of course but just a bit on the screwy side.

You must loathe getting up in the morning and have a positive horror of going to bed at night. You mustn't speak to a soul before you have your morning coffee.

To get back to money again, you must have only the necessities of life such as beer, books, sailboats and cigarettes. The rest of your money you may spend foolishly.

About these gifts. The throne is for your comfort and convenience; the rubber trousers to ease your way through the troublesome period of your youth. Be sure and make use of the throne. Young fellows are often inclined to follow their instincts on such matters. But remember—your instincts at that age are invariably wrong, besides being somewhat messy.

Just a word of advice. You will have scores of supposedly adult persons clucking and drooling and gibbering over you. Pay no attention to them. If they become insufferable, just brush them off with some crisp phrase such as “get thee to a nunnery—go.”

They will tell you you have your father's chin, your mother's nose, your cousin's eyes, your grandmother's ears, your great-grandfather's dimples and your great-great grand-aunt's behind.

That kind of drivel must be met with dignified silence. Or if you get the chance you can always bite the commentator's finger.

And oh yes, one more word of advice: don't do any of that howling which persons of your age are given to while your Uncle Don is around. He is very high-strung and it gets on his nerves.

And if by any chance they give you to me to hold one day, remember what I said about the throne and your instincts.

That's all for today,
Your Uncle,

Don.

(?) June, 1942, Winnipeg

Dear Jim;

Just a word to confirm that I have been inducted, inoculated, and enkhakied into the C.A.S.F.—the spearhead, which General McNaughton assures us, is a dagger pointed at the heart of Berlin.

Right now I am not pointed in any particular direction. It took me three days to be enlisted—stating my name and pedigree at intervals of about four hours. Now I have been in for two days and they haven't found anything for me to do. I am sleeping at the barracks, but I feel almost like an impostor. I have not yet earned a single meal in blood, sweat, or tears.

To-day I was lolling around on my bunk, wondering when the familiar shouting at me would start, when a barkish lance-corporal fastened upon me and told me to put on fatigue overalls and start sweeping. This was the crowning indignity. He disappeared. And so did I—home for the rest of the day.

However I expect I shall shortly be assigned to some humble niche. My unit is the 2nd Battalion Royal Winnipeg Rifles (little black devils). Mother is angry at me for joining as a private. In fact she shies skittishly away from me when I come in in my battle-dress, fearing bedbugs.

The boat will be ready for you, although not in the very best of shape. Mother no doubt told you about our spill. It was really very nasty. I was deeply ashamed of having taken kids out in Sandy Hook harbor—which is not a harbor at all but a rat-trap of reefs. I am going to try and get young Allan Best to get the boat in good shape. He is summering at the beach, and will keep an eye on it I think for the privilege of sailing it. Well, this typewriter is required by the military.

See you soon,
Don.

P.S.—Jack Croucher (BUP Montreal) is here in the orderly room. A youngish veteran and a good fellow.

June 29th, 1942, Winnipeg

Dear Jim:

This laborious, painful, and illegible scrawl explains in itself what I lack—a typewriter. Having no “twter” makes writing a physical and mental agony. I shall find it hard to accept the bayonet in its place as my best friend. Hence this request; if you are not making much use of the little Remington could you please lend it to me for a few months? This depends entirely of course on whether or not it has become indispensable to you. If so, forget the request.

The army life proceeds according to plan. The best description of that life has been aptly given by Private E. J. Kahn, U. S. Army, in the *New Yorker*. It is: “Hurry and Wait.” That is, rush furiously at the bellow of a sergeant to get into line and then wait maybe hours for what was intended to happen—to happen.

I startled poor Mother the other day by telling her I was bunking with a pure blood Iroquois Indian who took his first bath upon enlistment. She was greatly relieved when I amended the information by saying we were three bunks apart and he washes his face regularly with the rest of us.

Suggested reading—*The Last Time I Saw Paris* by Elliot Paul. The most charming, humane, and delightful piece of writing I have struck for some time. Discovery; *The Last Puritan* in of all places—the Garrison library, made up of library contributions from the Can. Legion War Services. Santayana was flanked on the left by G. H. Henty and on the right by E. M. Montgomery; on the top by *Fireside Poems* or something; and below by somebody’s *My Trip Through the Black Forest*. Orchids to the Canadian Legion!

John D. was seized by homesickness, or “I must go back to the prairies” mood, and is in Winnipeg. He hopes to visit you later some weekend. Incidentally if you can part with the typewriter, you may help yourself to my records in exchange. A dubious deal. Am looking forward to lifting a couple with you soon. Expect you won’t see much of Marion on the train if it’s filled with gold braid and brass. If you stop at Montreal, Hughie Newton (BUP) would be glad to see you.

Regards,
Don.

16th Aug., 1942, Winnipeg

Dear Jim;

I am slightly ashamed for having borrowed the typewriter from you and not written a line—even a letter. But the School of Instruction keeps one busy. There's such a vast amount of trivia to attend to—boot polishing, blanket folding, equipment cleaning, and many other brands of spit-and-polish. All this is considered of vital importance to the making of a fighting man.

Yesterday while the German Army continued its grim advance into the Caucasus, the School of Instruction was kept confined to barracks for two hours after noon Saturday to conduct a second inspection of bed spaces. The first inspection had revealed such heinous sins as blankets awry, bootlaces not tucked in, knives and forks tucked into mattresses, bits of paper behind radiators. The Colonel was appalled. Col. Blimp, I fear, is not yet buried in the Canadian Army.

Part Two orders Friday listed the promotion of Rifleman Duncan H42208 to the lofty rank of Corporal. Hitler, let's not forget was only a corporal, and look what an expert at organized slaughter he has become. Just as the V.C. is awarded for distinction on the battlefield, my two stripes were awarded for distinction on the parade square and in the lecture room. Six of us were jumped up a rank for having obtained the highest marks in the school. In the fullness of time, no doubt, I will be made a sergeant—that is, from a shouted at, I will become a shouter at.

Spent the last few days at the St. Charles rifle range. To my mild surprise, I was not a bad shot with most infantry weapons, and was particularly eagle-eyed with the Bren. A born soldier I guess. Liked your card. As a matter of fact the day I got it we had been doing fieldcraft (hide-and-peek). One section advances down the field near the woods, trying to escape observation from another. We carried bits of foliage wedged into our helmets. I felt like a bit of Macbeth's Birnam woods advancing on Dunsinane.

Sometimes I feel we are being trained to fight the war of 1914-1918. However some concessions have been made to Blitz warfare. For example the left form and fix bayonets have been officially eliminated as drill movements. You can fix or unfix bayonets now in your own time. And there is less time spent on drill (but not so you'd notice it from where I sit). Forgive my ironic mood. I had a bad night last night wetting my stripes.

There is much good fellowship in our bunch, but as far as I am concerned, very little meeting of the spirit. Much army humor, little real wit. Much talking, little thinking; much concern with the war as it affects the

day-to-day operation of the school of instruction; nothing about the war as it affects the country, the empire, and the world. But all that is as it should be I guess. Ours not to reason why and so on.

And so to catch the last street car to Fort Osborne Barracks. Drop me a line sometime.

Don.

Aug. 22nd, 1942, Winnipeg

Dear Loot-Comm:

Rather than be accused of beating around the bush, I shall come right to the point—lend me five dollars!

My financial situation has evolved from the solvent, to the insecure, to the critical, to the desperate. In short, I am leaving for Nanaimo, B. C., on Tuesday for a three weeks gas course with only five dollars to furnish the amenities. I may get paid there of course but even so it will be short shrift with which to see the sights of the Pacific Coast. Five dollars—no more, no less—will see me through nicely. In fact it is a magnificent sum rarely encountered except on payday in the ranks of the R.W.R.s.

The gas course, I am afraid, is the penalty for having obtained a good mark in elementary chemical warfare at the school. It means delving into all manner of horrible concoctions, and studying various diabolical schemes for exterminating the human race. However it will be a pleasant change to get away from here.

To-day (Saturday) I am battalion orderly corporal. My term of duty from reveille to reveille. So far I have been called upon to perform the following tasks; One—Parade the sick. (There weren't any to-day.) Two—Parade the dentals. (March six men fifty feet around a corner to the clinic.) Three—Report hospital discharges. (There weren't any.) Later, I shall be called upon to parade the defaulters (there aren't any to-day), and after that attend staff parade at which I shall say "Sir" when my name is called. I suppose I should use my spare time to read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*.

Saturday is inspection day and there is vast fussing about tidy bed spaces. This morning there was rather a harassed last minute debate on whether or not the straps on the small packs should be crossed left over right or vice-versa, and whether or not the corks of the water bottles should face the front or the rear. For the record, the rear won out. As orderly corporal, I

am constrained to take a thoughtful and intelligent interest in these problems.

For the last few days I have been an acting section leader in “A” company. In that capacity, I am under instructions to give “hell” to a pathetic group of farmers, who are willing, well disposed, but not very well organized.

The poor blokes are so accustomed to vituperation and abuse since their first day in the Army that it doesn’t really matter whether you scold them or praise them. They remain bewildered and apathetic—with of course exceptions.

Horizons are unbelievably shrunken in the Army. Even the Dieppe raid aroused only a passing interest in the rank and file. The headlines would be scanned and then there would come a rush for whatever comics were available. Incidentally today’s casualty list has Ross Calder among those missing.

I have practically no time for reading these days. Only manage to glance at the *New Yorker* from time to time to remind myself that there is still some sort of civilization without the army walls. Well we do have a lot of fun in here. And there are many good chaps among the NCO’s.

And so to Nanaimo.

Don.

Don

Don

Don

Don

N.B. (I mean P.S.)—If you are broke, forget the \$5. I exaggerated my case.



PACIFIC COAST—SEPTEMBER, 1942

1 Sept., 1942, Nanaimo, B. C.

Dear Jim:

Thanks for the prompt manna from heaven. Myself, Corporal Edgley, and Sgt. Taylor are very grateful. But that extra five will be like the forbidden apple in Eden—sorely tempting.

I shall try and salvage it for the first repayment. There is still my income tax to come. First payment when I get my third stripe, provided the ceremonial “wetting” is not too expensive. I fear I have champagne tastes and a beer income.

Nanaimo is a swell change—a charming spot surrounded on all sides by free scenery. Somehow the study of gas does not fit in with the pastoral setting and idyllic weather. To-morrow it’s the “D.M.” chamber, which means coughing, pain, vomiting, and severe mental depression—for perhaps four hours or more. The recommended (official too) first aid is alcohol—lots of it—which sounds reasonable enough.

Cheerio,

Don.

7 Sept., 1942, Nanaimo, B. C.

Dear Folks,

Well, here’s a bit of news from the West coast. Church parade was called off this morning, which gives me a bit of time on my hands. This afternoon I am looking forward to a pleasant stroll or boat trip around Departure Bay. The weather is perfect—and has been all along. Too bad I am cooped up in lecture rooms most of the day.

Yesterday we had our chlorine gas chamber test. We go in the gas chamber with respirators adjusted. The concentration is strong enough to kill you in two minutes but the respirator provides complete protection. Following that, you go in the chamber without your respirator—just to find out what it’s like—for a few seconds only of course. It really hits you. You cough your lungs up for about an hour and feel pretty tough for 2 or 3 hours. However, I recovered pretty rapidly and feel swell today.

Earlier in the week we had “D.M.”—which causes nausea and depression. A few beers (the recommended antidote) put us on our feet again. Have also had tear gas—the effects of which you can readily guess. So you can see I am really learning about gas first-hand.

Our quarters are comfortable, the discipline mild, the food O.K. and I much prefer the life to Fort Osborne. Hope they send our unit here—or hereabouts.

You might drop me a line and let me know if anything extraordinary has happened in the Peg.

The Best to All,
Don.

23 Sept., 1942, Winnipeg

Dear Jim,

When this letter reaches you I will be en route to what I no doubt should refer to as “somewhere on the Atlantic coast.”

I had just dusted the soil of Vancouver Island from my clothes, eaten a few home-cooked meals, and re-organized my kit, when we were plunged into the most complicated “hurry-and-wait” manoeuvres which always precede a troop movement.

Just what’s in store for us out there I haven’t the faintest idea. We are still only half up to strength so it can’t be overseas immediately unless we are to be reinforcements. Right now I am sure we would not affect the balance of power in favor of the United Nations by the smallest tip of the scales.

I had hoped for the west coast, for a while anyway. Besides the grand weather and scenery there, I met a girl from New Westminster. The romance can scarcely flower when the principals are three thousand miles apart.

I’ll drop you a line upon arrival and maybe we can manage to get together some week-end.

All is well at “75”. Marion is still keeping a watchful eye on all three services. Nothing tall, dark, and handsome escapes her. A lad she knew—and I presume you know—was lost with the “Ottawa.” Guess you knew many of them. The Navy really took it in the neck last week.

Gord Major, despairing of ordnance promises, is taking a commission in the P.P.C.L.I. (Infantry) in November as a reinforcement officer. Bade him cheerio today.

All this train-riding and note-taking at Nanaimo has made me soft and lazy again. I shall have to start all over again to get hardened up.

Until I see you—exigencies of the service and red tape allowing—bottoms up.

Don

Don
Corporal Duncan, D. A.
“D” Company
3rd Battalion Royal Winnipeg Rifles
Debert, N. S.
Sept. 27th, 1942

Dear J. L.

Just a note to let you know where I am pigeon-holed for the time being.

Arrived this morning after a wearying train trip. It was virtually impossible to sleep on colonist car “beds.” On the credit side the food was good. But again on the debit side a competition was organized with a five dollar prize for the cleanest car. This prompted an incredible orgy of sweeping, polishing, shining, etc., which lasted from Kenora to Debert.

One comical aspect; Corporal Bolton, a mild and civilized bloke who is a confirmed anti-spit-and-polish, rather tight (a dry trip for most of us), sat over his bunk cross-legged like an Iroquois tribe leader, intoning, “I shall polish nothing, I shall shine nothing. Sweep—you goddam Trail Rangers—sweep your bloomin’ heads off!” (Bolton’s two humble stripes gave him a measure of protection). The “Y”, the Salvation Army, and the K of C are here in full array so there is no reason why I shouldn’t write occasionally. Besides I brought the typewriter which soon will be in action.

Chances of me getting to Saint John are slim—for a good while anyway, (broke as usual), but if you can get a weekend at Truro sometime would be swell to see you.

Cheers,

Don.

P.S.—What we do here, to what Division (if any) we are attached, how long we stay, only the master-minds at Ottawa know. At any rate, no one at Debert expected the advance party when it arrived. Carry on Canada!

29 Sept., 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Dorthy:

Finding a little spare time on my hands as I await the dentist, here is a brief news blast from Debert—more affectionately known as the posterior of Canada.

A rain storm, the worst in Nova Scotian history, heralded our arrival. One regiment stationed at a small town here, according to the papers, was washed out under four feet of water. The poor lads used the floors of their tents as rafts to go poling after their equipment, much of which was lost. But to-day, the day broke bright and clear, and our spirits rose.

So far we have been “getting settled.” That in the Army means settling in one barrack room, the next day moving to another and so on. During the process there is a vast amount of shouting, ordering, sweeping, etc. My stripes protect me from fatigue duty, so I just drift around looking either busy or important, and doing precisely nothing. There are scores of newly-flowered NCO’s anxious to exercise their lungs and they have had ample opportunity in the past few days.

Well I have only a few minutes, so a word to Nancy—

Hello Nancy!

Iss Onkel H-Y-M-A-N talkink! Iss ranink like everydink here. Rad clay on ground. Solchers averywheres. Radder be at home awready. How vas dinks dere? Papa behavink hissself? Juty beink goot girl? Hopink so anyways. My! Dentist callink my teeth. Muss go.

Lovink and affekshuns
H-Y-M-A-N

4 Oct., 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim:

Barring any unforeseen circumstances, such as an unusually long piece of red tape, I will have next week-end. Having seen Truro, which consists of a main street and several alleys flanked by houses painted either green or brown or discolored green or brown, I am not amused. Unless you would like to visit Truro, I suggest, if you can get the weekend we meet in Halifax.

I’ll leave it up to you. Name a time and a place, allowing for travelling time, and I will be there. The only amusements in Truro are a dance hall where officers are not admitted and a few cinemas showing last year’s pictures.

Regards,

Don.

4 Oct., 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks:

Well, there really isn't much news. But all the auxiliary huts around here advise us in glaring posters to "write home and write often" and I know you like getting letters as much as I do.

I received a long distance call from Saint John a couple of days after my arrival, and who should it be but the Loot-commander. He said he owed me a letter and decided to pass on his regards by telephone. We have a tentative arrangement to get together in either Truro or Saint John next weekend.

About this town of Truro, which is a respectable distance from camp. The story is that about a century ago a packload of brown and green paint—mostly brown—arrived. There was enough paint to paint everything in the town either brown or green. Anything that has been built since has not been painted at all but has taken on either a green or a brown discoloration. Without being deliberately uncharitable, I am constrained to report that it is rather a dreary little place.

The province, like the country and the people, is dry. There are no parlors and the liquor commission only opens at hours when there is no likelihood of any service people being about. If you go to a dance—"the" dance I should say—you can't get a cup of coffee and a sandwich afterwards because all the shops close up at midnight. It is strictly an Army and Airforce town. The young women, having had the choice of about two hundred thousand Canadian soldiers in the past two years, have a vastly inflated opinion of their own importance and charm.

Our Establishment as you know is far from complete. This means many fatigues and no chance for promotion for some time to come. I shall be thoroughly trained as a janitor by the time I am ready to go overseas. Nobody in particular is to blame for all this. It's just the Army.

I am looking forward to seeing a few towns in the province on my weekends which come or should come—every other week. Halifax and New Glasgow, I think, will be my first destinations.

Dad, I hope you will keep in mind the Free Press. I will be watching for it. I doubt if I will require any books because the Canadian Legion here has a surprisingly excellent library.

Love to all
Don.

P.S. If the enemy attack the coast, I am sure they will by-pass Truro as unimportant. The Nova Scotians are fine people, but it wouldn't do any harm if someone kicked their collective behind to start them breathing.

*Mr. Grogan took a sandwich out of the open box and bit into it,
"Please thank your Mother for me."*

"Ah, it's nothing," the messenger said.

*"No," Mr. Grogan said, "It is something, please thank her for
me."*

"The Human Comedy"

H42208
Sgt. D. A. Duncan
3rd Bn. R.W.R.
Debert, N. S.
Oct. 14th, 1942

Dear Dorothy:

It was very cheering to get your newsy letter. You had no business enclosing the dollar bill. I am horribly irresponsible about money and it only makes me worse to receive such gifts. All the same it was very thoughtful. Tell you what I'll do. I'll use it to pick up some little gift for Nancy and Judy. But don't tell them because I might conceivably forget and they would be disappointed.

As you will see by my new title I have been promoted to sergeant. This rank carries with it many privileges, among them decent meals properly served by waiters in our own mess. Besides, I have made some good friends among the NCOs and right now am not particularly interested in trying for a commission.

I expect D.S. had an interesting time at Churchill. I would very much like to know what has been going on there. But of course all that is a military secret. Give him my regards. It was good to see the old gentleman at the train when I pulled out. I hope your operation doesn't give you any trouble. In any case you deserve a bit of rest so make the most of it.

The Loot-Commander and I had a pleasant week-end at Saint John. And as I told Mother in the last letter, he is safely entrenched against designing

females in the lair of two fuss-budgetting old sisters. Jim was his usual generous self and we dined royally at the town's poshest hotel.

For the time being I am posted as an instructor at a Brigade school our unit is running for the benefit of the other two units in the brigade. That, I expect, is crystal clear to you. It's not a bad job but it means lots of work. Let me know how hospital life agreed with you. And the best of luck.

Love,

Don.

Dear Nancy,

HYMAN is sarchunts now. MY! Three strips on da sliv! All day long iss hollerink at der poor solchurs like dis; Ten . . . Chuns. Standinks . . . at eeeesss! Am writink play about childtren in classes. My play iss for concerts next week. Fine wrider I am besides beink sarchunts all day long. Kissinks for Juty. And no monkeyshiningk while mama in hospissal.

End of Ladder,

affexions,

HYMAN

18 Oct., 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks,

Well, this is Sunday, the day most of the boys set aside to catch up on their correspondence. But it isn't exactly peace and quiet. There are two radios blasting away on different programs in our quarters. Radios can be both a blessing and a nuisance.

We are fast settling into a routine out here. But as soon as we are settled, I expect we will all be off somewhere on operational duties. I have practically given up Truro as a place of amusement and spend most of my time right in camp. Incidentally we train all day Saturday now which is a damn nuisance. Then next Sunday I go to the ranges with the brigade school students. So that doesn't leave much room for week-ends.

As soon as I get another chance I will be off to Halifax. John Hamilton has been transferred there and we are looking forward to a reunion. I am also looking forward to a Christmas furlough which I may get and may not.

Dad—that Sinclair Lewis piece you enclosed in the last batch of editorials I had read with enjoyment several years ago. In fact it gave me the

inspiration for a little editorial piece I wrote for the Free Press entitled "Money." Anything like that however is always welcome.

Mother. Perhaps I haven't acknowledged all the letters from home. But you can be sure I am getting them. And they brighten this dreary existence muchly.

We are a congenial crowd in the sergeants' quarters and we have a lot of fun despite the meagre attractions of Nova Scotia. I would like to get away for another course but don't see much chance of that in the near future.

There really isn't much I can tell you about what goes on here. You don't know what army stuff is all about anyway and that is our meat and drink all day long. As a matter of fact I don't know what it's all about myself.

Three of our sergeants became fathers within three days of each other. Two of the births occurred—happily enough—while the lads were in Winnipeg for two days leave en route from Nanaimo to Debert.

Well, today I feel like doing nothing more ambitious than sleeping—something one can never have enough of in this place. So to an afternoon nap.

Love to All,
Don

Oct. 20th, 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim,

Just a note to keep you informed of the latest military secrets and thank you for an excellent, though short, week-end.

This Brigade School has kept my week-ends tied up since. When it is over, I should get a long week-end and I propose to go to Halifax and lift an elbow or two with J. D. Hamilton. If you could make Halifax that same week-end it would be more the merrier.

Thanks for the *New Yorkers*. They are almost impossible to get in town. One store stocks a few but they are usually sold out when I arrive. The *New Yorker* casts a little sanity and perspective into this otherwise stark and earthy existence. Above all it brings a type of humor completely unknown in the Army.

Last night I was served my rightful portion of regimented pleasure. It was like this. The I.O.D.E. Entertainment for Lonely Soldiers' Committee (I

suppose it's called) arranged via the division, the brigade and the regiment, that sixty (no more, no less) N.C.O.s and men from the R.W.R.s would be treated to a dance—sixty pure-bred females guaranteed by the I.O.D.E.

It was all very charming and spontaneous. At 6.00 p.m. we, the chosen, paraded in front of our barracks for roll call. There we were warned that we must be on our best behavior to make a long-lasting impression on Truro femininity. No liquor—not so much as a drop. Shined shoes, pressed trousers, no shyness, a bland, beneficent Sunday morning smile.

At 8.00 we fell in again. At 8.15 the trucks fell in. At 8.30 we fell in the trucks. At 8.40 the trucks fell out enroute to Truro—at 20 miles an hour (12 in the town).

Frozen, legs aching, we arrived in Truro towards nine. The whistle to debuss from the trucks came promptly in about five minutes. In turn, our names were called out and we entered the scene of hostilities. We were not required to march in at attention owing I suspect to some incompetent's oversight. The Army lined one wall. The I.O.D.E. lined the other. Came the music, and the Army made an organized charge for the I.O.D.E. So on into the night.

At ten-thirty, hot chocolate and jam-and-peanut sandwiches were served. This followed the “supper dance” which compromised me, reluctantly to be sure, with a sweet, prim, vacuous thing with whom I shared the sweets.

The I.O.D.E. congratulated the colonel, the adjutant and others on our splendid behaviour and excellent dancing. We, in turn, congratulated the I.O.D.E. on their fine arrangements, sprightly damsels and general full-bosomed co-operativeness. In short, a grand time was had by all. I had such a rip-snorting, whooping, hell-bent-for-leather jamboree that I fairly retched with exhilaration and belched with excitement.

At 12.00 p.m. the I.O.D.E. filed out. The Army filed out. The trucks shunted around, and there was a diverting quarter hour of “hurry and wait” before the procession of soldiers, their social natures eased, proceeded on its way to camp.

But here's the funny part. Most of the soldiers had a helluva good time. And the I.O.D.E. is a blessing in the serviceman's life.

I seem to have digressed. Army life continues with one day much the same as another if not more so. Today I took two companies of a neighboring unit in the brigade through the gas chamber—D. M.—and made them all quite unwell. This always cheers one up and forestalls boredom.

Had an amusing letter from J. D. H. on the gay life of Halifax, another from Dorothy on domestic affairs on Elm Park Road, one from home reporting all well, another from a radio firm in Montreal, much less entertaining, which contained a threat to sue. Damn well serves them right for omitting to bill me for the balance my radio. Shades of civilian life. No importance whatsoever.

Cheers from Debert,
Don

Oct. 29, 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks,

Another mid-week letter because I probably won't have time to write on Sunday—battalion orderly sergeant. Cheated out of another week-end leave which I had planned to take in Halifax. Such are the exigencies of the service.

The brigade school has kept me fairly busy of late. Much of my spare time has been spent preparing a couple of skits for the forthcoming concert. The rest has been spent playing a game called "hearts" in the sergeants' mess—a game by which one can lose money at an alarming rate. I think I shall give it up.

Thanks mother for your newsy letter. I am glad you struggled through the week with the kids alright. Take things easy for a while. Roy tells me two other friends of mine are preparing for matrimony. Soon there will be only J. L. D. and myself left.

Next week-end I am going to try and get a long leave and a much-deserved rest. I applied for furlough today, effective Dec. 20th. Whether I will get it or not I don't know, there are so many applying for furlough at that time. In the meantime, let's hope for the best.

It's a healthy life this, if somewhat dull. Gigantic meals, much gophering about in fox-holes playing hide-and-seek, endless tinkering about with all manner of weapons. My eyes fail me I am so tired so this inadequate note will have to do until I find a long and leisurely afternoon to write a more respectable letter. Tell Marion to write by all means, and I'll do my best to answer in kind. Give my love to Lulu at new new-found domicile.

Cheers,
Don

Dorothy—Frank Emma (in the next bunk) sends his "love."

Dorothy—Arni Coulter (in the left bunk) also sends his “love.”

Nov. 3rd, 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear J. L. D.:

Another week-end queered by the exigent “exigencies of the service.” One week ranges. Another, orderly sergeant. Another, final reports on Brigade School exams (I am Brigade School clerk unfortunately).

So the week-end of Nov. 13-14-15 is definite for Halifax. Frank Emma will probably be going with me and perhaps Arni Coulter. J. D. H. will be so advised. Considerable hell will undoubtedly be raised. Emma has a couple of leads towards dates. Can you make it?

I have applied for furlough Dec. 20th—six months to the day. But I may not get it till after Xmas. I will get Xmas leave—six days—but no travelling time. If you happen to get stuck over Xmas along with me we might get together. *New Yorker* coming regularly and much appreciated.

All is well at Debert except that I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in.

Cheers,

Don

Nov. 5th, 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Mother et all,

The Xmas leave situation looks slightly improved. I may get away on furlough for 21 days on Dec. 7th. But, I have discovered, you can never be sure of anything in the Army. So I am keeping all my fingers crossed. The brigade school ends this week with examinations. Not being an examiner, I have had things fairly easy for a change. But Friday I leave on a “brigade scheme,” which will keep me out under the stars—or perhaps the rain—for four or five days. This, at any rate, will be a change and a chance to see something of the country.

After that, perhaps a week on motorcycles. Then maybe my leave. Time flies fast in His Majesty’s Service. I shall probably arrive home with very small coin in my pocket. You will undoubtedly find me a very unprofitable boarder—which will be nothing new of course. That can be your contribution to the war effort—or part of it.

Roy keeps me informed of the marriage market. One by one they fall like soldiers going over the top. Who'll be the next? Not me. Nor Jim, with the maiden sisters standing guard over him.

Next time you write I would be delighted to find enclosed a pair of flannelette pyjamas—if the envelope is large enough. Failing that, the shirt situation is rather critical. Dress shirt size 14½. Those are shameless hints which you are fully in your rights to ignore. Dad. Thanks for the “old man in his glory,” [a snapshot taken at Sandy Hook] October too. We have had a bit of the same weather the past few days.

And so to the hospital to get fitted for army issue glasses. I broke a lens in battle drill the other day and decided it was time I got the army issue. Don't be alarmed I'll have my others fixed too for social purposes. The army issue doesn't run to style. All is well from where I sit—the brigade school orderly room, where I do a considerable amount of sitting.

Love,

Don

16 Nov., 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim,

Sorry you could not make Halifax last week-end. However it did not turn out to be overly exciting. We were a party of four. Frank Emma, myself, and two bottles of Rye. At Halifax, we were joined by J. D. H., a case of beer, another bottle of Rye, and a female acquaintance of Frank's.

So it goes without saying that we made up for the year-long drought at Debert. In my case, I am glad to say, with reasonable moderation. Frank's girl friend's friend failed to materialize. But J. D. H. and I had a good bull session. John is doing some good work at Halifax. On the basis of one story he wrote he was asked to write a book by a publishing house. As yet he has not acted for want of time. Also an “encouraging”—if this is possible—rejection from *McLean's*—“Not just right but let's see more of your work. Brightly handled, etc.”

I am becoming incorrigibly lazy. I am even wasting my precious youth on such futile card games as “hearts.” I don't know. One just seems to get that way. I must pull myself up by the bootstraps, or I shall become a sergeant, morally, mentally, and spiritually.

About leave. I am pretty sure of getting a combined furlough and Christmas leave—21 days—on Dec. 7th, which would allow me until

Christmas evening in Winnipeg. Your large talk of Boston, etc., sounds fascinating. But with a fairly good leave, the family have a legitimate claim on me. The family are not going to find me a very profitable boarder. Feeding me and keeping me in chocolate bars will have to be part of their war effort.

How about your leave? Let me know before I depart.

Had a note from Gord Major who has left for Three Rivers as an officer-cadet.

Enough for now.

Don.

Nov. 16th, 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks:

Here it is again—perhaps a little late this time. Well, I received to-day with vast satisfaction, a pair of pyjamas to keep me warm and a shirt to see me to Winnipeg. Also Mother's newsy letter. Many thanks. The leave situation is still under control. I expect to get away about Dec. 7th and may spend a week-end in Ottawa en route on the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Simpson.

I finally got that week-end. Frank Emma and I set sail for Halifax and splurged at the Nova Scotian hotel. As a matter of fact we spent the first night at a Y.M.C.A. hostel at 25 cents a bed. The second night at the Nova Scotian at \$6.50 for the room. Rags to riches. But it was fun. Meant to look up several acquaintances in Halifax but just didn't feel in the mood. Hamilton was with us of course. He has done some good work on Halifax war stories and is making quite a name for himself.

My work of late has become extremely boring. With our unit under strength, things are not just as well organized as they might be. However I am lucky in having an amiable crowd in the sergeants' quarters. It makes all the difference in the world.

Glad the midgets enjoyed my trifling gifts. I'll try and do a little better next time. Roy writes me faithfully and each letter is packed with vital statistics about the doings of one Peter Duncan, who is sunrise and sunset in the Watson household. Incidentally the Stevensons are infanticipating, but I have forgotten just when the event is to occur.

The war news is encouraging. Makes you feel, at any rate, that you are not butting your head against a stone wall. Don't know what Jim's Christmas plans are. I'll get in touch with him about them shortly. Well, I have let a lot of mail pile up these past few weeks so this will have to do for now. Dad—thanks for the *Newsweeks*. They are always welcome. Also the *Magazine Digest*.

Love,

Don

November 19th, 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Roy:

I am afraid I am several letters behind you. You are, sir, a most excellent correspondent.

I am still thirsty after reading your last epistle which was brimming over and frothing at the top with alcoholic lore. Well, tomorrow night I'll have an opportunity to wet the proverbial whistle. The sergeants are partying a group of gals from town in our mess. I am not over-optimistic about the brand of female likely to appear but I have solemn assurances from Sgt. Frank Emma—our caterer—that the liquor will be first-rate. By the way, Emma and I were at Halifax last week-end, and we spent a very bibulous time along with John D. Hamilton (now BUP-er there).

The army situation here right now is rather depressing for reasons that I can't transmit in print. You have an idea of our establishment. What the hell are they going to do with us? With things as they are at the moment, I am more or less marking time until my furlough comes up. The army life is dull enough when you are busy, but it approaches the intolerable when you are idle. Your "write-to-Duncan" club has my enthusiastic endorsement. Already received a most amusing note from Phyl Coulter, along with a *New Yorker*.

These showers must be rather trying. There seems to be an outrageous run on marriages these days. What is it, the war? . . . or some astronomical phenomenon? Sooner or later some misguided lady will catch this sorry sardine on her fishing-hook and think she's got a salmon. Then I too will stalk along the aisle, imprisoned, enslaved, dedicated, benighted. From the union will spring a Peter Watson Duncan, shaped in the image of his father, a sorry thing.

The early-to-beds are yelping at me already. They don't like the pleasant rhythmic clack of this machine. Noblesse oblige. But it won't be long now

before you will have the privilege of pouring me a drink (paid for no doubt by some unidentified third party) while I decorate your Xmas tree. Did you get the *Winston Churchill*?

Cheers,

Don

28 Nov., 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks:

I am definitely behind in my mail this time, I owe letters to everyone. Laziness, sheer laziness. A creeping ennui that descends upon one after a period of dull routine in the Army.

But my leave is just around the corner, and I intend to put the Army completely out of my mind—if possible—for two weeks or so. If I took the Army too seriously, I would be shocked at the incredible pattern of thought peculiar to the army mind. But ours not to reason why. I was just reading Ralph Allen (former Tribune—Toronto Telegram star sports reporter) in *McLean's* on the Army—"Listen, Soldier." He said; "In the Army, a private soldier knows nothing, and does everything; a sergeant knows everything and does nothing; an officer knows nothing and does nothing." That is pretty close to the truth too, although as Allen says it is rather flattering to be the "party of the second part."

There's really nothing I can tell you about our army life in print. First there's censorship. But as far as that goes Hitler would get nothing but a laugh if he knew what was going on in my particular corner. Then there's the fact that army activities are not only incomprehensible to civilians but to many soldiers themselves—including this party. But the main thing is that I am reasonably content, well-fed, well-exercised and in good health. And the tide in various theatres of war seems to be turning in our favor gradually.

Mother. You would be amazed at the Sunday evening dinners in the Sergeants' Mess. The Cook goes to extra pains for that meal and a bit of ceremony is involved to add variety to our life. Last Sunday it was hors-d'oeuvres, grapefruit-juice cocktail, tomato soup, salad, roast veal with dressing, brown gravy, choice of vegetables, mashed potatoes, cold ham, pumpkin pie, cookies, coffee, and fresh fruit. And they say there's a war on!

My literary fare consists invariably of the *New Yorker*, Dad's *Newsweek*, *Time*, which Frank Emma buys, the *Halifax Herald* or *Chronicle* and the Winnipeg papers. There's seldom time or inclination to read a book. Tell

Marion and Dorothy that I shall personally deliver the letters I owe them when I arrive in Winnipeg—unless I am seized with sudden inspiration before that time. I think I leave on Dec. 8th and may take a day or two in Ottawa.

Nothing definite as yet. I forewarn you however that by the time I have paid my fare and berth to the wheat city I shall have to go very slender on Christmas presents, if any.

Hoping to see you all soon.

Don

Dad,

Your unidentified piece on “Leaving people out of your consciousness” is ideal for you at your Sandy Hook Shangri-La. But to apply it to me calls for some comment. I can’t forget people because they are as thick about me as flies on a horse dropping. I have no more privacy than Nelson’s monument in Trafalgar Square. If I forgot my Sergeant-Major for one moment I would become a casualty on the home front. If I looked at the reflections in puddles of rain water too long, I should become the wretched recipient of a swift kick in the hind end.

If I stared at the cumulus or cirrus clouds, someone would think an air-raid was imminent; if I stared too long, they would put me in the guard house. As for the sensation of grass or loam on my soles, I am already familiar with it. Also familiar with the sensation of grass, loam, mud, clay, and swamp, on my elbows, knees, thighs, hips, and posterior fundamus.

“No place is so urban that the sky has been blotted out.” NO? Wait till you hit the rainy season at Debert. You won’t see a cirrus cloud, or hear the “small song of a sparrow” for weeks. “The feel of the wind against your flesh.” . . . Yes, I felt that also to-day. We marched to a lecture and my cheeks are beautifully rosy and chapped. Whatever Buddha had in mind when he went strolling in the country is certainly not in line with what I usually have in mind. Buddha may have been concerned with his soul; I am concerned with my soles; which sometimes hurt. “Trees have not ceased to have green leaves . . . nor the earth to have a good feel underfoot.” There isn’t a single tree worth speaking of around here. And the earth hasn’t had a good feel under foot since I joined His Majesty’s Forces.

“Happy week-end.” Yes, happy week-end to you at Sandy Hook. But happy week-end be damned out here; there’s church parade to-morrow!

With those trifling comments I return the piece, which I found very enjoyable.

Cheers,
Don

[Undated probably Dec., 1942] Debert, N. S.

[Jim had written asking for Don's comments on the idea
of an anthology on famous last words.]

Jim,

You have the authority of the literary editor of the third Bn., R.W.R. that it has been done. I read in some magazine or other about a year ago an article entitled "Famous Last Words." Don't know about any anthology.

Incidentally I once wrote a piece for the Free Press on the Winnipeg Public Library in which I referred to a request which had them all humping unsuccessfully for about two weeks. Some blessed creature who probably resembled a Thurber cartoon wanted very badly to know whose last words were these:

"I think I would like one of Mrs. Sweeney's pork pies."

Several answers came to the Free Press after the article, none of which the library could confirm.

Here are my last words in advance:

"Yes, sir."

Don

4 Dec., 1942, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim;

Just a note, as usual. I will be pulling out of Debert on or about the 13th. What, if any, are your plans? The pattern of our life here is taking on the character of a full fledged labor or fatigue battalion. Needless to say most of us are getting pretty damn fed up. But nothing can be done about it. Such is the wisdom of the higher priced help in Ottawa. Ours not to reason why, ours but to sweep and cry.

By the way I had already read with much enjoyment the piece by Ralph Allen. Thanks anyway for popping it along. I heard he spoke over the radio

recently upon arrival overseas. J. D. H. saw him in Halifax before his departure and chewed the fat aboard ship.

I am finding it more and more difficult to sustain an interest in doing virtually the same thing every day. However if I ever expect to climb any higher I shall have to exude enthusiasm and bonhomie. I wonder if it's worth it.

Did you hear Churchill's last? Confident, but no trace of complacency. And the Churchillian touch still sure. And so to a beer and bed.

Don

December 21, 1942, Winnipeg

[to Peter Duncan Watson]

Dear Peter Duncan:

This is your first Christmas and I hope you enjoy it. Pretty soon you will be learning to talk so I have chosen this occasion to warn you about adults.

Adults you will find are very imposing people. But Peter you will be amazed when you discover how silly and mischievous they are. Actually you may never have to worry about them. Because right now all the adults in the world are busy killing each other off as fast as they can. Pretty soon there may be only children like yourself left. Then you will have little difficulty putting the world back on its feet.

But that's just a possibility, not a probability. Chances are you will have more than enough to do with adults. Let's start at the beginning. The English language is a fairly difficult one to learn. But you must count on no assistance from your parents or their friends and relatives—all adults. You will have to learn the language from children a little older than you. You see, as soon as adults notice you trying to talk, they will enthusiastically start to teach any language but English. They will scrupulously avoid speaking the King's English to you. Instead they will talk an idiot language which they describe as "baby talk"—as if all babies were born idiots. Unfortunately you will be in grave danger of picking up this monstrous jargon unless you take a firm stand against these adults. If you pick it up, you will find yourself talking baby talk at the age of five years old. Many adults, in fact, were exposed to so much baby talk in their youth that they never learned to talk anything else.

Adults, Peter are really impossible people. They spend all day buying things as cheaply as they can and selling them as dearly as they can. They take this ridiculous swindling seriously and call it “business.” And it is all transacted at a mysterious place known us the “office.” When they are not swindling each other they are batting a little white ball all over the countryside. When they have to hit the ball too often to get anywhere with it, they lose their tempers, which is pretty nearly every time they play. This game is called golf. Any self-respecting child would think it a frightful bore—which it is, but the adults won’t admit it.

They have all kinds of stupid habits, Peter. Most of them blacken their lungs about twenty times a day with smoke. In the evenings they sometimes drink colored water which makes them behave like a dog chasing its tail, and makes them talk more nonsense than usual. The next day they have headaches and are not fit to live with.

But that’s not all. Every adult has a toy called a radio. And believe it or not these adults will sit for hours on end, listening to this radio tell them they have bad breaths, bad smells, bow legs, indigestion, bad livers, dandruff and inferiority complexes. The radio then tells them to buy some pills which will frighten away all these evils. This the adults do. And the evils disappear. But since the adults never had these evils to begin with, it all seems sort of silly, doesn’t it?

Every day you will discover some new absurdity committed by adults. They are Christians all day Sunday and heathens for the rest of the week. They are capitalists in their offices and socialists in their public speeches. They are democrats when out for dinner and tyrants in their own homes. They think Shakespeare is the greatest writer of all time and never read him. They think politicians are unreliable scoundrels but listen to all their speeches. They gave up thinking for themselves as soon as they became adults, and take all their opinions ready made from the newspapers.

But the worst of it is, Peter, they have lost their childish imaginations. Their lives are so dull and threadbare that they must go to the movies at least twice a week to witness the kind of life they think they ought to be leading. They have no idea themselves of how to make a mediaeval castle out of a sandpile. For you, that will be like falling off a log. They can’t fight an imaginative war with tin soldiers. They fight real ones and destroy each other. They have forgotten how to play cops and robbers. Instead they rob each other and are more frightened of cops than when they were children.

So you see Peter, adults can be nothing other than a bad influence on you. Just humour them, get along with them as best you can and seize every opportunity to educate them. If you have a strong personality, you might be able to make human beings out of them. They're really not bad people at all. They have just forgotten how to be children.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,
Uncle Don

3 Jan., 1943, Debert, N. S

Dear Folks,

I am afraid I am a little late in reporting my safe return to dear old Debert. But here I am in my own little bunk wishing I were back in Winnipeg. Things are deathly quiet here with more than half the unit home on New Year's leaves.

I was disappointed on my recommendation for a commission. Two of us were turned down and only one selected. I was not really surprised because I don't think I hit it off any too well with the personnel selection officer who interviewed me. Besides I did poorly in the aptitude test which is given us on enlistment. As a matter of fact I didn't bother much about the test and could have done much better if I had understood its importance.

There are the usual rumors about our moving some place. And one day soon one of the rumors is going to prove founded on fact. But even if I did know anything I could not tell you. In the meantime I think I'll try and get away on another course.

The bedroom slippers are getting full use in the barrack-room and sergeants' mess. Also the razor blades, etc.

Tell Jim I was pleasantly surprised to find two *New Yorkers* awaiting me on arrival—also a note from him which came after I left. And I'll try and get a week-end at Saint John when he returns.

Cheers,

Don

P.S. Tell Marion that Frank Spiller was also turned down. He's considered the best N.C.O. in our unit and is mad as hell.

Now the three soldiers began leaping over one another at a swift, crazy game of leap-frog, pushing down the immortal street

nearer and nearer to the War.—“The Human Comedy.”

January 4, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Roy, Bette and Peter Duncan:

Well, it was fun while it lasted. So here I am back in the wilderness. The Sergeants' mess is like a morgue, with three-quarters of the boys still away on furloughs. Coulter and I, having read everything tolerable in sight, are suffering from a momentary but acute case of boredom. If we could find a third and a fourth, we could play cards. If we had any money, we could have a few beers (I think we'll have to have one anyway, just for something to do).

New Year's was quite an event here. Frank Emma broke all precedent in the sergeants' mess by springing a brazen surprise on the officers. They were over for the traditional drink. Just when they were ready to leave, Frank, with all sails aloft, ordered them to fall in in two ranks. When Frank gives an order, there is no mistaking it. They fell in, albeit a trifle bewildered and embarrassed. Particularly the commanding officer, who didn't quite catch on until Frank shouted . . . “get the hell back into line . . . you!” When Frank had them all lined up, Arni Coulter inspected them and Frank then reported to Major Norman—acting 2 I/C—saying: . . . “alright corporal . . . take over.” I don't think Norman was quite happy about it.

New Year's morning Frank and the R.S.M. carried my mattress and blankets, with me inside, out the building and deposited the entire mess in the snow. I peeked out, sniffed the cold air, and promptly tucked in my head and went back to sleep. Next thing I knew a pail of cold water was emptied over me. Yes, I got up. All in all, it was a pretty lively New Year's. Good thing it comes only once a year.

I was pleasantly surprised to be met in Montreal by Jim and Dick Murray—bright and resplendent in their navy gold braid. We three, along with a couple of R.W.R.'s promptly adjourned to the Queen's bar where a pleasant time was had by all. Later I dined with Jim, Dick, his Mother, and his fiancée.

Did you get the boiler-maker [Lieut. Irv Stevenson, R.C.E.] on the train alright? It was certainly a lucky break seeing him. Hope we manage another get-together before this business comes to an end. Give Pat Kelly my regards, and ask him to let me know by card how he fares at Gordon Head.

What has Peter D. been up to lately? I hope he is taking my advice about paying no attention to adults. They are inclined to be war-makers. Peter D.,

when he grows up, must be a peace-maker.

Well, the barrack-room is cold, Coulter is getting restless with the lousy novel he is reading. So we are going further into debt to the extent of one beer—to be sipped slowly and philosophically.

Cheers,

Don

Bette—let me know when you're ready for another celebration and I'll catch the first train.

14 Jan., 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks,

Afraid this letter is also several days overdue. With many of our unit still away on leave, a spirit of lassitude has set in at camp, and somehow I just can't apply the seat of my pants to a chair long enough to catch up on my correspondence.

There's really no news. For the past week and a half I have been learning all about driving, gassing, oiling, greasing and babying army trucks. Lately I have done nothing but drive all day long. It's rather monotonous but I do get a chance to see a little of the country. At any rate I may be able to get a job as a truck driver when the war is over. If that fails, I shall certainly be qualified for a caretaker's position.

My commission may come through after all. I am going to write a new aptitude test next month. I am pretty sure I can get a satisfactory mark because I didn't take the last one very seriously. On the other hand I may be packed off overseas at almost any time. Such is the Army.

Meanwhile I play cards, read, chat, while away the time, and hope the war won't last more than another two years. I am editor of a unit newspaper which we are going to put out this month. This, at least, is something to relieve the boredom.

I see Jack Morrison has been awarded the D.F.C. I can't visualize him as anything more than a cherubic faced, shy little boy. Heroism pops up in the most unexpected places. Give my regards to Dorothy and tell her I will write her within the next few days. I owe everybody letters. And since this is such a short one I'll try and get another letter home this week. And so to the *Truro News* with the Padre to see about printing costs for our paper.

Love,

Don

Marion—Your picture has provoked several interested inquiries.

Jan. 17th, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks;

I resolved I would get a letter away to-day if I had to write it in my sleep. I suddenly found myself plunged into three days of feverish activity. A new company has been formed and the clerical work fell to my lot—owing to the fact that I am the only one available at the moment who can type. On top of this we are definitely going ahead with the unit newspaper. And that means more worry and work for this Majesty's servant. However it's better to be busy than to be bumming.

I haven't left camp since my furlough ended. Next week maybe I'll manage a trip to Halifax. (I was just interrupted by Norm Anderson, who gave me a long peroration on how to run an insurance business,—a chore at which he has been eminently successful. Incidentally I asked Norm what news he could dig up to put in letters home and he said emphatically "None.")

Anyway it is as cold as Hades in this orderly room right now and any news that may be lurking somewhere at the back of my mind is frozen. Next time a real letter.

Cheers,

Don

P.S. That's the shortest one yet. But the news is all on your side of the fence, so don't answer in kind.

*Who is the Happy Warrior? Who is he
That every man in arms would wish to be?*

Wordsworth

20 Jan., 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks,

My last letter was so short and hurried I feel conscience-bound to try and do a little better. Such a shower of birthday cards. You made very sure I would remember my nativity, which otherwise I would most certainly have forgotten. Received also a birthday telegram from J. L. D. promising a book

to come. The book subsequently came—James Thurber's *Let Your Mind Alone*. Thurber is nectar and honey to me.

To-day was a "Big Day" for us. We were inspected by the D.O.C. Tomorrow is even a bigger day. We are to be inspected by the General. Inspections are inevitably preceded by a glutinous orgy of cleaning and polishing. The inspecting officer inspects everyone on parade, asks a few irrelevant questions, someone drops a rifle, someone else gives a wrong and ridiculous word of command, there is a march past, and it is all over but the post-mortem.

Marion. Thanks for your letter. I shall try and write you a separate letter soon. Glad you are holding your own as far as marks are concerned despite boring lectures which give you a chance to write this happy warrior. Your letter will be along in a couple of days.

Received a letter from the pioneer of Winnipeg Beach, Mrs. Leighton. She is writing a novel, on and off. "It stinks," she says, which is more than likely a fairly sound judgment. Anyway it was nice of her to write me. By the way she told me she wrote an article for an army magazine based on something YOU, my dear mother, told her about my army activities. Please Mama, use discretion!

Well, I must get over to the men's quarters to see that their equipment is in shape for tomorrow's inspection. A loathsome but necessary chore.

Love to all,
Don

22 Jan., 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim:

Thanks for the birthday message along with Thurber who has already done more for my morale than the combined efforts of the Salvation Army, Knights of Columbus and Canadian Legion War Services. Your message along with a shower of birthday cards from home, made me sure I remembered my nativity.

I am afraid I talked myself out of a commission in my interview with a personnel selection officer. I more or less intimated that there was no job for which I am more magnificently unfitted than brow-beating my fellow creatures. On top of that I got a poor mark in the army's aptitude test. When I came to the section on tools I left it out almost entirely on the grounds that I was not enlisting as a carpenter. However they are going to give me a new

one to write sometime this year and I have committed myself to take it seriously. I have since absorbed a vast amount of information on tools and internal combustion engines which will see me through with plenty to spare. They made Lloyd Bolton write another test because he got a worse mark than I did. He was probably in a "I shall shine nothing, I shall polish nothing," mood.

The day before yesterday we were inspected by the Brigadier. Yesterday it was the General. God knows who it will be next, probably Himself! We spent two days cleaning our company's barrack room. He never looked at it. I memorized the names of all the men in my squad. He never asked for them. We squeezed an incredible amount of authorized junk into our packs. He never looked into them. He knew we were bluffing. We knew he knew we were bluffing. He knew we knew he knew we were bluffing. That's what inspections are like. I wonder if the Russians have them.

Tomorrow I am leaving for an overnight at Halifax. Next week I may be going to Long Branch, Ontario, for a month's course on Platoon weapons. It will be nice getting away from Debert although platoon weapons have a strictly limited fascination for me.

I recently finished a week's course in truck driving and maintenance, which has given me a lead toward a post-war occupation. But to keep the old typewriter in practice, I am working on a unit newspaper. Bolton and the Padre are my associate editors, although they have nothing more in common than a flair for the King's English.

If the Long Branch business comes up, our week-end will have to wait a month or so. Maybe the war will be over by then. An Act of God, assisted by the Russians, may exterminate the German race, with the exception of my opera singer friend in Heidelberg, whom God must surely spare.

Cheers,

Don

27 Jan., 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Marion:

So at last I find a moment to take care of the spark plug of Universitas Manitobensis. Thank you for your birthday card, letter and sentiments. They were very cheering.

I have no exciting activities to tell you about. Excitement is scarcely the order of the day in and around Debert Camp. However, Norm Anderson and

I did manage to get to Halifax last weekend. The train was late and we didn't arrive until 10 o'clock Saturday night—a bit too late to stir up much trouble. But I did have a pleasant re-union with John D. Hamilton who, incidentally, spent a day with Jim not long ago in Saint John.

The Eaton's, Montreal business sounds very interesting. However I would give considerable thought to Dad's views on the matter, whatever they are, in view of the fact that you are the last of the clan. But don't take a stupid job in Winnipeg just to be home. I haven't any friends in Montreal who might be much help to you—mostly newspaper people with their own wives and worries. However John D. is being moved back to Montreal shortly, and I am sure he would be glad to show you where to go, where not to go, what to do, what not to do.

Glad to hear you had a pleasant time with Doug Chown's friends. I hope you can keep the whole sad business stored away somewhere at the back of your mind. Life flows on smoothly and meaninglessly at Debert. But praise God we have excellent companionship in the Sgts' mess. My best to your pals, particularly Barb who was such a good partner on New Year's Eve.

Cheers,

Don

27 Jan., 1943

(Aboard a CNR train enroute from Debert to Long Branch, Ont.)

Dear Folks:

Whithersoever I go, my typewriter goes. Right now I am a part of a troop movement of two. The other part is Bill Walsh, and we are on our way to Long Branch for a five weeks' weapons course. Pleasant release from the bondage of Debert. (How I am managing to hit the right keys most of the time is almost miraculous, with the motion of the train.)

It's a 24 hour trip to Long Branch, and we are not vouchsafed a berth. There is nothing to do but read, doze, smoke, chew gum, eat gluttonous meals and continue reading. Just finished Stephen Leacock's piece on Mount Royal in *McLean's*. It almost made me homesick for my adopted home of Montreal (which I shall see for about twenty minutes to-morrow).

One thing about this soldiering; one does get around. Last week-end I revisited Halifax. Soon I shall be week-ending in Toronto, (please don't ask

me to look up any relatives near, far, or semi-distant). I had wired Hamilton the day before to get a room for my chum and myself, but he had been unable to get anything. So John bunked on a couch in his office, and his visitors took over his quarters. I should say his “quarter” because his current garret is about a quarter the size of a modest dog kennel. Norm Anderson and I had to breathe very gently all night so as not to bulge out the walls. However Halifax is Halifax and John is saving money in his poet’s corner. We crossed the harbor to Dartmouth in the ferry and had a good view of the shipping and a good blast of cold weather.

Just before we left Debert my colleague received an enormous package from his girl friend in Winnipeg. This he took along and we opened it on the train. Contents, as far as we have excavated, include cough drops, tobacco, apples, soda biscuits, licorice candies, peanuts, gum. I suppose we should have sent the box to an agency handling relief for war impoverished civilians.

I think I just got out of Debert at the right time. They are doing winter training with snowshoes, skis, gigantic packs, and tiny rations. Winter sports in the army are not quite as congenial as in civilian life.

Cheers to all,
Don

Feb. 3, 1943, Long Branch, Ont.

Dear Jim,

Please consider this note a semi-urgent appeal for a lend-lease of two dollars. So far my cigarettes and incidentals have come out of loans from my colleague. But now he has run dry. No pay till the 15th. Drearly ascetic prospect.

Whence this sudden visitation of penury? Montreal. Montreal—en route from Debert. I have sent two other distress signals back to camp for two dollars each. But from previous experience with R.W.R. sergeants, I have much more confidence in this one. Long Branch, 12 miles from Toronto, is a pleasant change from Debert. The course is fairly easy, the hours reasonable and the discipline not too irksome. After the 15th I hope to escape into Toronto once in a while and look up a few friends.

This typewriter, incidentally, is a godsend. Without it I am inarticulate. So I am very grateful to you for having let me keep it even though I feel

rather guilty in having more or less forced you to get another one of your own.

Just finished *Little Man* by G. Herbert Sallans, my former boss in Montreal. Ryerson all-Canada fiction award. It's very readable; some good characterizations, some excellent writing and some very poor writing. Particularly good his portrait of R. B. Bennett. Certainly not the great Canadian novel. Not as well written as the Sinclair Ross book [*As for Me and My House*] but much wider in scope.

Irv. Stevenson is now the Proud Father of one David, so-named after the late "senator" of Chestnut Street [David Bowman]. Damn nice gesture on Irv's part. Mrs. B. will probably be grateful.

And so to the "bucket of blood" for a coffee and doughnuts (if I can borrow a dime). The B of B is a little juke box cafe across from the camp invariably filled with CWACs and Long Branch factory girls investing their leisure in the more abundant jitterlife.

There are two things one can never escape from in the Army. First, in the huts (this does not apply however to our own camp where there is a much better type of fellow) interminable and anatomical discussion of women; second, in the mess or canteen, the incessant and infantile titter of ping-pong balls. The latter gets on your nerves so badly you even, in desperation, take to playing the game yourself.

Cheers,

DON

P.S. Will you kindly head any further *New Yorkers* Long Branchward? Interested to hear you still have the newspaper idea in mind. I imagine the most authoritative information could be obtained from the secretaries of the various provincial weekly newspaper associations; and from Editor and Publisher.

6 Feb., 1943, Long Branch, Ont.

Dear Mother,

Thank you very kindly for your prompt and overly-generous response to my distress signal. It relieved the situation considerably; I shall be on a firmer footing again on the 15th.

I have only been in Toronto once since my arrival here. It's an hour's street-car ride in; another hour back. So unless there is something particular to do or see there is not much point in taking the trouble. However since you

tell me Dick is in Toronto I shall certainly try and look him up sometime next week.

This afternoon I listened to the New York Philharmonic concert over the radio in the sergeants' mess. Next Thursday I think I will go to the Minneapolis symphony playing at Massey Hall. One thing about Toronto—one of the few good points—it is the most musically alive city in the Dominion.

Hope you got *Little Man* which I see is one of the current best-sellers in Toronto.

I shall get a few days' leave after this course which Bill Walsh and I plan spending in the ever-charming metropolis of Montreal.

No more news on this front,

Love,

DON

18 Feb., 1943, Long Branch, Ont.

Dear Folks,

Herewith your intermittent bulletin on the army life from Long Branch, Ontario. All goes well, although I am beginning to miss the news from Winnipeg, having been out of contact with the *Free Press* and *Tribune* for several weeks. However I did see yesterday that Hall Tingley is a survivor of H.M.C.S. "Louisburg." Had no idea Hall was in the Mediterranean.

The weather here (I can't think of much else to talk about) has been awful. Cold! Not as cold as Winnipeg, I can imagine, but cold enough when you are outside half of the time on the bleak shores of Lake Ontario. I intend to look up my friends in Toronto this week-end. Previous week-ends, financial embarrassment confined me to barracks. Thank you Mother for attending to the Stevenson offspring chore. I shall try and recompense you in due course.

Had a cheerful letter from the smaller Duncan fry which I shall answer one day soon. Glad to learn Marion is still making a stout effort to keep up the morale of the young men in gold braid or brass.

It is pleasant reading the paper these days. The more Germans the Russians dispose of, the fewer left for me to attend to when they ship me overseas. That day cannot be so far off. Anyway it's time I quit puttering about and saw a little action. Well, a note is better, I hope, than nothing. And

a note is the best I can do right now. Two more weeks at Long Branch. Then a short leave in Montreal. Then back to desolate Debert.

Cheers,

Don

Feb. 18, 1943, Long Branch, Ont.

Dear Jim,

Just a note to thank you for so promptly coming to the rescue. Hope you did not put yourself in a spot for so doing. And thanks for risking your records to me on loan. I can't use them here but am looking forward to much pleasure from them when I return. I will guarantee good care and safe return.

Thumbs up to Hall Tingley for getting safely out of that "Louisburg" mess. Guess old Hall will have some story to tell when we see him again. Saw "In Which We Serve" in Toronto the other day. If that's propaganda for the Navy, then let's have more and more of it. Noel Coward can apparently turn his hand to anything with invariable success. Incidentally he reminds me very much of J. R. Murray, the eyes, the impassive face, incisive speech.

Last week I went to the Active Service Canteen in Toronto. There was a dance on upstairs. The males in attendance represented all services, many nations, many creeds, and several colours. The females all wore yellow chrysanthemums, indicating they were Toronto ladies dedicating their evening to making the lot of service people somewhat more romantic. On entering the hall, a social hostess immediately approached me and asked if I would like a partner. (Please, read it on "my" entering the hall, for grammatical purity). This was rather alarming but I was too embarrassed to refuse. So out came my partner, beaming with benevolence, and inspired with a fearful determination to raise my morale at least two feet. After the dance I decided to give my morale a boost by trying another partner. So back I went to the entrance and walked by one of the vigilant hostesses as if I had just come in. Again the seizure, again would I like a partner? Again the breathless introduction. This young lady however was under the impression (well-founded) that all soldiers are jitterbug artists and the resulting exhibition was painful to parties of both parts. The young lady was very gracious. But I could not help noticing that she looked faintly relieved when a negro corporal swept her away on the next dance in a cyclonic fury of flashing legs, arms and teeth. About this time a senior social hostess instituted a game of musical chairs. I considered it expedient to withdraw,

and did so, refusing politely three invitations “would I like a partner” on the way out.

Had a pleasant evening with Dick the night before he left for Ottawa en route to Annapolis. We had many a chuckle over the multitudinous absurdities in our respective services.

Cheers for now,
DON

P.S. My instructor’s latest adventure in the higher English. “What does a fire order donate to you?”

1 March, 1943, Long Branch, Ontario

Dear Folks;

Another belated news report from Long Branch. Just finished a tremendous washing and my fingers are most marvellously clean—clean right down to the bone.

The course in small arms draws near the end, to my gratification. It has been nice getting away from Debert, but the course, I am afraid, has been very much on the dull side. But don’t tell anyone I said so. Being an infantryman I am supposed to have a passion for weapons of destruction.

Stepped out socially the other night to a supper dance, just for the hell of it. An amiable brunette. I think her mother is anxious to marry her off because I have been invited there twice to dine. One must maintain eternal vigilance against such stratagems. Now I am faced with a four-day leave this Thursday and virtually no money. My own fault of course, so this time I must grin and bear it.

Hope Dad has recovered from his bout with the flu. There’s a lot of it around here at the moment but so far I have escaped. Went to a show with Hughie Newton the other night. He is busy as a bee as Air Force editor of the *Toronto Star*. He is also a father since six months. Thanks for my ration number. God knows what I am supposed to do with it. But since you deem it important I shall stow it away for an emergency. If Marion hits Montreal this spring perhaps I shall have a chance to see her. It will certainly cut down the strength at “75” to a bare minimum.

Don’t think it will be very long before I am drafted overseas. It is pretty obvious that the Canadian Army Overseas has something up its sleeve for this spring. I should be able to shoot straight enough by now. And I know when and how and where to duck.

And now to dispose of a few other letters which have remained unanswered too long.

Cheers,

DON

P.S. Presume Dad's trip to Toronto fell through. Would have been nice seeing him.

(?) March, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Ma, Pa, Marion:

Back, snug as a fox in a fox-hole, at Debert, eastern Canada's most popular and populous desert.

Before leaving Toronto, I looked up the Fulchers and, having no money, imposed on their generous hospitality for a couple of days. All are well, including Shirley Anne who is fit for a magazine advertisement of a health food. Agnes [Mrs. Harry Salmon] dined me once and we talked of her husband, the major-general. I shall look him up and slap him on the back a few times when I arrive overseas. A year's time has wrought a miracle in Agnes' health. She looked vastly improved. Helen is also well, and full of righteous indignation at Toronto's street-car gallantry. All in all, a pleasant change.

Squeezed a couple of days in Montreal with the co-operation of the Y.M.C.A. Earl Beattie, another friend of mine from Winnipeg, was about to trade places with John Hamilton in Halifax. Looks as if I am in for considerable hard work after five weeks of comparative ease at Long Branch. Missed an overseas draft while I was at Toronto but my number will be surely coming up one of these days, the way things are going.

Have been spending tonight catching up on my letters (battalion orderly sergeant). Am still writing my little friend of the west coast but I met a new brunette in Toronto. I think I shall switch my correspondence to her. That will save me using on airmail stamp!

Hope you are all well and Pa is over his bout with the flu. When is Marion leaving for Montreal? Or is she, still?

There is an awful argument going on outside. Two soldiers (rather drunk), one is singing "I'd rather be a zombie than an active service guy." The other is calling him a "yellow-bellied bastard." Even worse. "R" recruits don't seem to mix well with active service soldiers. All quiet now.

Tell Aunt Lu I am sorry the liquor ration will deprive her of her weekly mickey of gin! Give her my regards anyway. Wherever I go, there goeth foul weather. My two days in Montreal happened to be during the worst blizzard in that area for half a century. I didn't mind though. I had my galoshes with me.

Cheers for now,
Don

P.S. Just got your last letter. Thanks for the dollar. I'm out of trouble now so will put it toward a birthday present for Marion.

*. . . and there, ahead, all he could see, as wide as all the world, great, high, and unbelievably white in the sun, was the square top of Kilimanjaro. And then he knew that was where he was going.—
Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro."*

March 12, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Roy et al:

This is the kind of paper I like for writing letters; you can get everything on one page. A little late, as usual, with my correspondence. But here I am with what gobbets of cheer that can be squeezed out of this swamp. The rains came today; and when it rains here it is like a flood in Winnipeg.

Sorry to hear of your multitudinous aches and pains. Hope your cold has taken roost in someone else (colds never disappear; they just move from one person to another). I too, often have a pain in the neck which only an armistice can cure.

For Bette's benefit I kindled a mild romance in Toronto. Another brunette. Dark, shapely, sweet. Nice dancer, nice sense of humor. Not too many brains. What do you think, Bette? Or would you rather have me retain an abiding affection for my little belle of B. C.? You, Bette, are in charge of my romancing. So I am counting on you for advice to the love-lorn.

Re *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. It is, and I shall brook no back-talk, one of the finest modern short stories in the English language. What happens? He dies of course. It is a very moving tragedy.

Torontonians incidentally are going nuts over the beer rationing. I think Ottawa will soon have to relax measures a bit. We are alright at Debert. But the mess at Long Branch was almost dry. How a confirmed alcoholic like you, brother Watson, is going to survive on 52 oz. a month, the Lord only

knows. The rationing doesn't bother me any because I never touch the filthy stuff. On occasion, I will admit, it has been forced down my throat.

Tell Pat Kelly to compliment Judge Adamson on his golf game and he will have no more trouble from that irascible gentleman.

Frank Emma and Arni Coulter put up pips the other day—a sad loss indeed to the sergeants' mess. They will be probationary 2nd “louies” for six months, then proceed to a qualifying school. Both are slated for home service in view of their ages. No doubt they will be after me again, but I have a hunch I may be on my way before the time is ripe.

I had four days' leave after my course but was so broke I had to spend it quietly with relatives—always a last resort for a soldier. Was even glad to get back to Debert where I can charge things in the sergeants' mess.

Well, much more to do in the way of letters. So let's call it quits until the next mail.

Hello Pete. You needn't leer at me. Quit growling.

It's pediatrics. (I think).

Cheers,

Don

March 21, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Roy:

Stop scolding me for my literary laxity. The Army life saps energy and initiative. After a day on the parade square and in the field I am up to nothing more than idle chatter, coca-colas and easy card games. I did feel guilty in church this morning however when the padre lectured us on procrastination, drifting, and passing the buck.

Thanks for the snaps and the glowing account of the alcoholic re-union. It made me homesick for wassail, song, and girls in seducing dresses (like Bette's in the picture).

So Stevie has taken root as a family man. Too bad he couldn't have a few months with El and the baby before he goes off to the wars. At any rate I hope he has a few weeks here. I really didn't get much chance to talk to him when he had that short leave at Christmas, we were both so busy assimilating the Christmas spirit.

No Bette. I am still master of my destiny and captain of my soul (what little soul is left to you after almost a year of soldiering). There is no chance of my getting married in this country. The only time I ever see a girl at Debert is when we have a party in the mess. Then, like most others, I am more or less seeing double. There's that young lady in Toronto of course. And another at New Westminster. So don't despair of me Bette, even though my hair is beginning to recede at the temple.

Peter looks as merry as Old King Cole in the snap, as healthy as Dr. Jackson's all-bran flakes, and as wise as Solomon. Give him my regards.

Tell Gert Maher to try and save an eligible girl for me until after the war. I can strike Alice McEachern off my list now. Noticed her marriage to Gordon Aikman in the paper. Alice would have made a dandy wife. Perhaps Peter has a suggestion or two.

Just received a letter from Jim. He is making inquiries about purchasing a weekly newspaper after the war. If he does, you will find this scribe on the job with his sleeves rolled up.

And now a letter home if I can find anything to say about life at this "misty mid-region of Weir" (E. A. Poe).

Cheers,

Don

*The love of books, the golden key
That opens the enchanted door.*

Andrew Lang

March 21st, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim:

Herewith my belated reply to your phone call and letter. I am buried once more in the somnolence of Debert, restlessly awaiting whatever the Army has in store for me, if anything. Right now I have a platoon of "R" recruits, at whom I launch volleys of abuse with the idea of making soldiers out of them. One man's name is Stanley. The remainder run to Wishnowsky's and even worse. It is not exactly my idea of the more abundant life. I am eligible for overseas draft which may come along any time. Much as I dislike the idea of playing at soldier with live rounds, I would prefer it to the dreariness here.

Thanks for *Trumpet in the Dust* which looks promising. Will probably dip into it to-day (Sunday). My draftees take up most of my time during the week. I was very interested in your inquiries re a newspaper. It appears from the letters that most publishers are keeping their fingers crossed until after the war. *The Perth Courier* would probably represent a very considerable investment, and you would most certainly need some backing. I think it's a good idea to keep in touch with some of the papers however, to more or less pave the way for post-war dickering and make useful contacts.

Incidentally I spent an evening with Earl Beattie and his wife in Montreal. We were at a friend of Earl's, who edits a new weekly called *Alert*. This lad is a printing salesman but bursting over with newspaper reform ideas. His paper is progressive and carries no advertising. Consequently it is pretty lively editorially. Of course he has financial backing from several different sources. This chap, by the way, has the finest private library I have ever seen. Five walls covered with nothing but the best. Also a swell library of records. Made me pine for the indolent days of old.

I spent a couple of days with Alex and Beth in Toronto after my course, (had to, no money and four day's leave), then proceeded to Montreal where I ate on meal tickets and spent a quiet evening at the Y.M.C.A. My own fault of course for not putting something aside for my leave. Met Earl Beattie quite by accident because I didn't know he was in Montreal. Earl is Canada's foremost William Saroyan enthusiast. He once travelled from Timmins, Ontario to Toronto with no money for the sole purpose of seeing a Saroyan play.

I have enjoyed your records muchly. Particularly the "Swan of Tuonela" which is very restful after a route march. Will return them shortly. I guess you and I were not cut out for regimentation, hence the boredom. Let me know when you have a free week-end and I'll apply for a leave. Is there anything to do or see at Moncton? That is the halfway mark between here and Saint John. Otherwise it is an eight hour trip for me to Saint John and takes up most of the week-end. Am returning the five since I am now in better financial repair. However I'll take a rain check on it. There might be another emergency.

Cheers,

Don

25 March, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Mother:

Here comes next Sunday's letter in advance. How's that for service? I am barrier guard commander tonight. Which means that for 24 hours I sit on my posterior fundamus, smoke cigarettes, drink tea, eat prodigious meals, read anything I can lay my hands on, catch up on my correspondence, and pray for a divine release from the monotony.

It was *so* a big wash. What's more I tried to do some sewing and knitting to-day. The knitting proved too much. So I am going to tear the heels right out of my socks, turn them into the quartermaster stores and tell them the socks are worn to a frazzle. (An old soldier's trick. I'm pretty near an old soldier now.)

Guess Dad is pining for Sandy Hook, flowers, bohunks and manure. (Or so he hints in a recent note.) By the way Mother, you must have been associating with one of Dad's bohunks according to one sentence in your last letter; "We have more snow than I ever seen." Well, I warrant she's bin blowin' some heresabouts too!

Received a cheering note from Dorothy, which reminded me I have owed her a letter for some time. Should be able to drop her a note before this guard vigil is over. She sent me a delightfully naughty story which I presume you may have seen. The rowboat and the wife. Dad. You need not continue with the *Free Press* editorials. I manage to catch most of them from the F. P. which arrives at our mess. Please continue with *Newsweek* however. It is much appreciated. Hope you get lots of Sandy Hook this summer. Guess that's all for tonight. Glad you saw Irv's offspring.

Cheers,

Don

25 March, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Dorty, Nancy, Judy,

Thanks for your very welcome letter. I know I am hopeless about writing letters, although I do manage to get a note off home pretty regularly. Hope you enjoyed your birthday outing and kept the old gentleman reasonably sober. I sent my best wishes in my last letter home. Anyway here they are again. Cheers for your thirty-third—or is it fourth? How are the bairns? Still as chirpy and healthy I hope. I have another friend a drivelling father now—brother Stevenson. Guess he felt pretty bad having to leave his family after a

week. Glad you are making good use of my radio. Unless very unusual circumstances befall me, it's yours for the duration.

Don't worry about the brunette. A mere passing fancy. How can I get married with Jim still a bachelor? No woman could ever get along with me for very long anyway. In fact I have a hard time getting along with myself—like the man who went to a psychiatrist and was told he was allergic to himself!

Time passes uneventfully at Debert, eastern Canada's most magnificently dismal swamp. The diversion in Toronto was a pleasant change however. Tell Mother not to worry about my going overseas. They will have to need soldiers pretty badly over there before they fall back on me. I think they're saving me for an invasion. Tell D. S. he can make use of the boat this summer if he has time and feels so inclined.

I am Guard Commander to-day at the barrier—24 hours of sitting on my flaccid behind. When the orderly officer walks in I snap to attention, salute and bark, "room—room 'shun!", whereupon my two Indians drift on to their feet, look vaguely bewildered, and grin. The other guards stand stiffly at attention until told to "carry on," whereupon they lie down and go to sleep again. All this of course helps win the war.

I have been using much of the leisure to catch up on my correspondence, answering letters any way up to two months old. There's really no news. But rest assured we are beating the hell out of Hitler with a mop,

Cheers,

Don

8 April, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks,

My gosh, I think I'm behind in my letters again. One loses track of time out here. The days slip by and become like one another as time passes. Jim and I had arranged a week-end together at Sackville, N. B., last week, but at the eleventh hour I had to back out on account of duties. So we are definitely meeting this weekend. At the moment I am on guard duty again, which is as monotonous as being in hospital, with the added annoyance that you can get little sleep.

You will be interested to know that we now have a washing machine in the sergeants' quarters. I went into action with it last week-end and did all my washing in a quarter of the time. Marvellous invention. Here's to bigger

and better labor saving devices! Understand from Jim that Dick is getting married in Montreal later this month. Jim says he might be able to make the wedding.

At long last it is beginning to look like spring in this country. I expect Dad is already hitting the trail for Sandy Hook on week-ends. Curiously enough I discovered to-day a lad in my platoon from the Sandy Hook district. His name is Zabudney and he and his brother have done work for Dad at one time or another. Their farm is north of Steve's. It's a fairly small world.

This morning I sent one of my guards back to the camp with the mumps. So far the rest of us are O.K. but we are keeping our fingers crossed. As a matter of fact I wouldn't mind getting them. A couple of weeks in the hospital would be a refreshing change. I never seem to get anything very important wrong with me. Life will be much cheerier around here with spring in the air. Debert is at its dreariest during the winter. I hope to get away oftener on week-ends, and see a bit of the country.

If I don't go on draft this spring, I will be up for a commission again which I will get if I decide to take my next "M" test seriously, and stay out of arguments with the selection officers. I suppose you would like me to be an officer, but I can't get overly enthusiastic about it. As an officer you have to be in deadly earnest about the Army.

By the way would you mind sending me those two records of Tschaikowsky's Fifth? I have a strong hankering to hear them again. In the meantime, Love to all,

Don

(?) April, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim,

Barring an invasion or a cranky company commander your arrangement for next week-end is O.K. I'll be leaving here at 10 a.m. Saturday, arriving Sackville in the afternoon (you can find the time by calling station)—Am on barrier guard again at the moment.

Thanks for the old *New Yorkers*. They arrived in time to lighten a dreary session of sitting on my behind.

I'll bring your records along, as well as the own-your-own-newspaper-after-the-war file.

Cheers in the meantime.

Don

P.S. If aught goes awry I'll wire.

April 16, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks,

Well, Jim and I had another pleasant re-union last week-end at the sleepy little university town of Sackville, New Brunswick. We stayed at a marvellous place—"Marshland's Inn." It was really no place for a P.B.I. (poor bloody infantryman). Large comfortable room, delicious meals, wedgewood china, beautiful pictures, a vast library, bed-side magazines and books, warm hospitality. Unfortunately it snowed all the time we were there so we were more or less house-bound. However it was a damned nice place in which to be house-bound. Saturday evening we slipped into a Mount Allison university dance and feasted our eyes on the throng of sweet young things in their dainty evening dresses. Nova Scotia, I discovered belatedly, really does have some pretty girls. Hope we'll manage another get-together in another month or so.

Yes Mother, I got Dorothy's cookies and they were in excellent shape thanks to the individual wrappings. As a matter of fact it was a lucky week because two days later another box of cookies came from my little cookie in New Westminster. Guess I haven't been forgotten after almost eight months in this wilderness.

Received a letter from cousin Richard today inviting me to attend his wedding if possible. I'm afraid it's no go but Jim will be there as best man. I guess Aunt Vern does feel a little sad about losing the last of her family. But Dick is getting a damn nice girl.

I heard about Jack Sails some time ago and along with you I hope I'll see him listed as a prisoner. Jim showed me a P.O.W. card he received from Bill Lang. Bill said he had received the 1000 cigarettes Jim sent and—to my surprise that this was not censored—said that he was still in fetters. Let's hope "Mother" Lang gets a few of the good breaks he deserves.

Tell Marion I shall certainly make an effort to see her when she goes to Montreal. Maybe Jim, Marion and I can arrange a family re-union. Thanks for sending my records. I hope they will arrive in good shape. Good luck on your exams Marion. Guess you feel pretty tough about Jack. It seems the enemy is determined to take away all your friends. Keep your chin up.

Nothing of much even to report from here. I have been very busy lately guarding over my Ukrainians like a mother duck. But I wish to God the government had never taken many of them from their farms. They were making some contribution to the war effort at home and a good many will never make soldiers. Nor will I, for that matter. And so to a glance through the *New Yorker* before bed. Love to all.

Don

P.S. Enclosed a belated birthday token for Marion. Believe it or not, we had beefsteak and MUSHROOMS for supper tonight. How are you civilians getting along? (Special treat of course).

April 16, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim,

Received a letter from Dick the other day inviting me to the wedding. Afraid I'll have to beg off, but I'm glad you are going to make it. I think from his letter that Dick is very pleased to have you for best man, so I hope nothing crops up to prevent your going.

I've been bogged down with tedious duties since our week-end and will remain bogged down until all our ducklings finish their basic training. However the weather here has taken a turn for the better, which makes fieldcraft, etc., much more tolerable.

Received a box of cookies from Dorothy the other day, followed by a second box from the young lady at New Westminster. Made me feel as though I was a prisoner of war. As a matter of fact I think I am.

Supper tonight brought one of war-time's rare and pleasurable surprises—beefsteak and MUSHROOMS. Honest Injun.

From where I sit, I think our next re-union will have to wait a few weeks. I suggested in a letter home we might conceivably get together with Marion when she arrives in Montreal. I am sure she would be glad to see both of us.

I am enclosing a note for Dick, also a couple of dollars toward a wedding present. How would you like to get something and make it a joint gift? Count me in for a couple of bucks more next pay-day.

Cheers,

Don

27th April, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks:

My mind is rather cluttered up with a host of irritating minutiae in connection with my small part in Canada's war effort. However I missed up on my usual Sunday letter so here it comes on Monday. The weather has been perfect lately. Saturday three of us went into Truro and discovered that the town is the proud owner of one of the most beautiful natural parks in Nova Scotia. It made me feel much better disposed toward my army-adopted town.

Incidentally, while in town I bought a wee gift for Nancy at the Metropolitan Stores. You might tell Dorothy that if it doesn't fit, she can exchange it at the Metropolitan Store in Winnipeg. All is calm and bright on the Debert front with, as usual, nothing of particular note to report. To confirm your inquiry, Arni Coulter is an officer and Bob Edgley is overseas.

Hope the Murray-Fee wedding went off successfully under Jim's watchful eye. I left the chore of selecting a wedding present to him and enclosed what available cash I had—also a "Godspeed you on your way, etc." note to Dick.

It seems as if I have been at Debert forever and am to remain here for all eternity. Somehow or other there have not been any pressing demands for my services overseas. Sooner or later I presume they will realize there is an able-bodied, pseudo-soldier vegetating his life away in this dolorous deserted village.

Thanks for Tchaikowsky's Fifth which arrived intact and has already furnished me with much enjoyment. Will probably lend it to Jim the next time I see him and borrow something in exchange. Have many little things to do this evening so please be content with this short note. Will try and manage something better before the week is out.

Love,

Don



"B" Company
and Bn, P.W.F.
Debert, N.S.
May 3, 1943

Dear Agnes,
I haven't followed the news very closely for the past week and just learned of Harry's death to-day in a letter from home.

I wish there was something I could do or say which could help you face such a staggering blow. I don't yet know the circumstances of the plane crash, but it appears to represent a grave loss to the Canadian Army as well as to yourself.

Agnes, you have already proved your courage by keeping your spirit intact during a long and painful illness. You have proved it again by your fine example as a patient, selfless and understanding army wife. And I know

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you will meet this bitter experience with the same courage and dignity.

It must be some consolation, if not now then certainly later, to know that Harry died honorably for an overwhelmingly righteous cause. I hope too you may find some help in the knowledge that we who are left are determined to make our cause prevail.

Sincerely
Don

May 3rd, 1943, Debert, N. S.

[Major-General Harry Salmon was killed in a plane crash while travelling on duty.]

I have found something of you in every man I have ever met, but most often it has not been enough. Now . . . I have found you again, better than ever, greater than ever. So, if you understand, I thank you.—“The Human Comedy.”

Dear Agnes:

I haven't followed the news very closely for the past week and just learned of Harry's death to-day in a letter from home.

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It must be some consolation, if not now then certainly later, to know that Harry died honorably for an overwhelmingly righteous cause. I hope too,

you may find some help in the knowledge that we who are left are determined to make our cause prevail.

Sincerely,
Don

May 9th, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Marion,

Thanks for your pleasant letter announcing your plans to take off on your own on May 25th. You have my best wishes and I am sure you will enjoy Montreal and shifting for yourself. However Mother and Dad will miss you terribly so you must make a point of writing regularly.

There is a possibility I may be sent to Three Rivers within a month or two, in which case I could pop into Montreal for the odd week-end. On the other hand it is just as possible I may be heading in the opposite direction on short notice. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

Have not yet had a report from Jim on the Murray-Fee shambles but I understand he did a noble job as number one man to the victim. I received a letter from Sgt. Bob Edgley the other day, getting all the dope on his trip overseas. Apparently it was uneventful except for seasickness and he is temporarily taking his ease in the sergeants' mess somewhere in Scotland. Naturally I can't tell you anything about overseas drafts but you can be sure that we are not forgotten about here at Debert.

If you get a chance please express my sympathy to Mrs. Sails. The war strikes directly or indirectly at every family in Canada, as you have painfully found out. I guess those carefree week-ends at Sandy Hook will never be quite the same after the war. There will be too many faces missing.

Don't worry about being lonely in Montreal. Just drop into the Piccadilly Club for a cocktail, and with your charm, you will soon be surrounded by admiring young squadron-leaders, lieutenant-commanders, and captains. John D's address, by the way, is the British United Press, 231 St. James St., where you are liable to catch him at any hour. John, I am sure, will be glad to see you and, unless he has got himself married lately, will give you an introduction to Montreal night life.

Cheers,
Don

18 May, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks;

Well here it is Monday and I apparently missed my usual Sunday letter. Thanks for the clipping of the R.W.R. celebration but as you know by now I wrote the story myself and arranged for the pictures. I am secretary of the unit publicity committee and will no doubt be forwarding more items about the R.W.R.s in the near future.

Frank Emma just got back from a battle drill course and spent an evening with Jim in Saint John. Reports J. L. D. in fine fettle. Received a note from Lally thanking me for some sort of bowl I apparently gave her as a wedding present. I sent Jim some money and told him it was his pigeon. Apparently he acted satisfactorily on my behalf.

There are a lot of changes going on out here at the moment which I can't tell you about. It looks rather as though I will not be on draft for overseas for some time. I have been recommended for a commission and will probably take officer's training in another month or so. Meantime I am still nursing along my bonny Ukrainians and busying myself with such things as publicity and unit newspapers.

Enclosed are a couple more snaps we took in Victoria Park, Truro, a couple of weeks ago. With me is Sgt. Cece Ames, who will soon be an officer. He was asst. advt. mgr. at the "Bay" before enlisting, (too bad, Marion, he's getting married shortly). We recently had a picture taken of the members of the sergeants' mess which may appear in one of the Winnipeg papers in another couple of weeks. I'll send you a print when it is developed.

Guess Marion will be leaving shortly. Hope she got my letter and she leaves with my best wishes for a successful siege of Montreal. You and Dad will have to carry the domestic torch alone until this damn war peters out. I asked Sgt. Mitchelson, a good friend of mine here, to give you a call when he arrives in Winnipeg. Hope you hear from him. I think he feels just a bit tough about leaving his brand new little wife to go overseas. That's the way it goes.

I have so many damn little things to attend to tonight that I hope you'll let me off with this inadequate note. There'll be another along early next week when I'll have more time.

Cheers,

Don

(?) May, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks,

Well, here I am again with the latest news from Eastern Canada's slough of military despond. Trust you received my card from New Glasgow, which I made my headquarters for a very pleasant week-end. I went back to my old-time enjoyable pastime of hitch-hiking. Took an evening train Friday night to N. G. and proceeded thenceforth via the well-known thumb and got everywhere I wanted to go with no difficulty. All in all it was a pleasant change and the weather was perfect.

We're duty company again this week which means guard commander jobs for me. These are horribly monotonous but they do give you a chance to catch up on your letters. All my spare time has been occupied this week with getting out our unit news magazine—*Devilment*. It should go to press this week-end and I will send you a copy as soon as I get it. I think we have done rather a smart job on it for a first issue. Hope so anyway.

Well, things are somewhat pleasanter here with the warm weather here apparently to stay. Aside from winning a few dollars betting on "B" Company's baseball team I have not been doing anything very exciting. I am not apparently slated for overseas draft at present. Most likely I will be sent to Three Rivers next month to qualify as an officer. If I qualify I will either go overseas as a reinforcement or be sent back to this unit. Still, you're never very sure of anything in the Army. Meanwhile, but for the unit paper, life is pretty boring. Hope to look up J. L. D. again when I get another week-end. And if I hit Three Rivers and have any time to myself (which I doubt) I will certainly slip into Montreal and see Marion.

Hope you and Dad have a good summer at Sandy Hook with Dorothy and the kids. Some of the country around Pictou County reminded me of the well-worn trail to "S. H." and I had a moment of nostalgia for the dear old sail-boat. And so to a few other long-neglected letters.

Cheers,

Don

May 27, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Jim:

I am forwarding, as per instructions, two voluminous letters from Mr. and Mrs. "John Bull." [Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Livingstone.] I think Joe is more typically English than the English. And Vim is pure mutton chop; and

lovably so. To Joe and Vim all Germans are monsters and all Britishers whitened sepulchres. Still we must admit they have seen sufficient to convince them that Nazis are not concerned with what is sporting and what isn't.

Mother must have put the wind up that I was about to make the crossing. Now it appears that it will be some time before I leave—barring “unforeseen developments.” I am being retained to qualify as an officer, when and where I don't know. I have been approved by the divisional army examiner who was highly suspicious of my intelligence at first until he gave me another army test (an even sillier one) which I apparently answered creditably. There is a chance I may serve here as intelligence officer. Hope so, since I would much prefer that work to the parade square, having had enough left turns for a lifetime. Don't be surprised however if I stay where I am. I have yet to be interviewed by the general who might tempt me into saying something facetious (a disability which often gets me into trouble).

I slipped away last week-end on my own to see a bit of the nearby country. Hitch-hiked amiably around New Glasgow, Trenton, Pictou, etc. and had a quietly enjoyable time, riding variously in jeeps, coupes, and even late model cars. Should be able to manage another week-end in another two or three weeks and suggest we have another re-union. Mother just sent me Marion's graduation gang picture. Imagine you will get one too. Some bunch of cuties. I like showing Marion's picture to the boys just to prove homeliness is not necessarily a family trait.

For the past week all my spare time has been occupied in giving birth to *Devilment*, the first issue of a monthly “news-magazine” of which I am the editor-in-chief. The thing is in the hands of the press at the moment (praise God) and I am sorely tempted to resign as editor before the next issue is aborning. Reason: too many associate editors, advisory editors, company editors, etc., who know virtually nothing about writing, printing, layout or artwork forcing their ideas down my throat. Have already had one company editor storm off in a huff because he was not “consulted” about this and that. However the inner editorial committee stood firm and the thing went to press. You'll get a copy when it appears. I have many laughs for you over it when we get together. Pure corn, of course. In fact I called the humor page “Korn Korner.”

This week has been livened up by a motorcycle course at nights. Being an expert bicyclist I take to the M.C. like Buck Rogers and am having a hell of a lot of fun. This week-end we'll be off on a convoy jaunt probably to New Glasgow. I respect the things however in view of the fact that an officer

or a sergeant pops off regularly to hospital every couple of months as a result of boldness.

Cheers,

Don

P/2nd Lt. Frank Emma, returned from Vernon, B.C., is still bouncing, but a little higher than usual. He reports three weeks of battle drill to be excellent training for a four day hotel holiday.

“Devilment” No. 1 June 1943.

27 May, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Mother:

You are being specially favored with two letters this week. But being as you are still my best girl I guess it's alright. I have a little more time on my hands now that the unit paper has gone to press. However it's not one thing it's another, and this week I am taking an evening and week-end course in M.C. (motor-cycle). For an old time bicyclist like me the iron monsters are not at all difficult to handle. All the same I treat them with respect in view of the fact that several of our lads have motorcycled their way into hospital.

The graduation gang picture is swell. I guess you'd have a hard time putting together a finer looking bevy of beauties. Marion is so handsome, it's hard to believe a homely guy like me can be her brother. Guess she will be in Montreal by the time this letter reaches you. Hope you and Dad will not feel too lonely. There's always the second generation (Woodman) to cheer you up. There is a chance I may get my furlough this summer in which case I shall certainly take it. Sailboat ahoy! But don't count on it. Never count on anything in His Majesty's Service until it happens.

Dad. Thanks for the letters from Mr. and Mrs. “John Bull,” which I have sent on to Jim. Vim and Joe are swell persons and I am looking forward to seeing them when I get over there. From the looks of things it may be some time yet but you never can tell. Am enclosing negatives you requested. Incidentally you will see me in the photo of the sergeants' mess when our news magazine comes out.

Cheers,

Don

. . . We, reposing especial trust and confidence in your loyalty, courage, and good conduct, do by these presents appoint you an officer . . .

P/2nd Lt. D. A. Duncan
3rd Bn., R. W. R.
Debert, N. S.
June 28, 1943

Dear Skipper,

I gather from letters from Marion and home that you are back in harness again so herewith the latest from the Debert salient. As you will note from above, I am now a provisional second lieutenant as of a couple of days ago. However the appointment dates back to May 15 which, along with the fact that I already own considerable gentlemen's attire, eases the financial burden considerably.

I have also been appointed acting intelligence officer which means my work will be vastly more interesting than hithertofore (I love that word). We are slated for operational duty (I already know when and where) and I am looking forward with childish pleasure to dashing about on my motorcycle like Nick Carter.

With the unit short of officers right now it is unlikely that I shall be sent away to qualify for several months. And with provisional rank you can't go overseas without reverting. However, having fought the dreary battle of Debert for eight months already I guess I can stick it out another seven or so. The real war might just as well be a movie for all the part I am taking in it.

Hope we can get a week-end together soon because I have some swell stories to tell you about la vie militaire which I don't dare risk in print. Well I guess that's all my headache will stand, (guests of the sgts' mess last night). Officer rank incidentally, notwithstanding all the nonsense attached to it, carries one blessed advantage: a measure of privacy. Hope you had a pleasant furlough (mine is now a huge question mark) and let's hear from you when you have an idle moment. Thanks a lot for the books. And the *New Yorker* still makes life tolerable for me.

Cheers,

Don

P.S. A P/2nd Lt. is the equivalent of a lance corporal in the non-commissioned ranks. Lowliest of the low.

2 July, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Ma'n Pa:

Thank you for your letter containing extracts from my embryonic flights into literature [written at age 13]. I particularly enjoyed my laconic observation to the effect that "I am second treble."

Thanks also for Marion's letter which gave me an excellent picture of her activities in dear old Montreal. It seems she is not pining away to a shadow through loneliness. I also noted with some amusement that every second paragraph or so contained either an outright request or a veiled hint for some item of this world's goods. But don't you feel TOO sorry for her. I drop those same hints myself once in a while but I am always conscious of my own profligate disregard for money.

Things are very quiet around here at the moment for reasons you will be given in due course. It wouldn't do for the Acting Intelligence Officer to spread rumors, would it? My furlough incidentally is still a very unknown quantity but I shall make a valiant effort to get it, barring an invasion or some such cataclysmic event.

Meantime I am leading a fairly peaceful existence although I seem to get stuck with orderly duties quite a bit which keep me confined to barracks. The weather here—with the censor's permission—has been lousy. In fact I am convinced Nova Scotia was created as an Old Folks' Home for damp-minded retired senators. Just happened to glance at a quotation from *Reader's Digest*, "Change is an easy panacea (cure, in case that's a puzzler), it takes character to stay in one place and be happy there." Guess I just ain't got no character, thassall.

Well, I hope Sandy Hook is living up to its reputation for sunshine, glorious warmth, bright youthful voices, flowers, Bohonas's, manure piles and automatic pumps. Trust you got my previous letter and are sending along my garments. Am awaiting with ill-concealed impatience the arrival of said pyjamas.

Love,

Don

3 July, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks:

Since there is no church this morning I shall celebrate my thanksgiving by writing you a note.

Received your parcel yesterday containing most welcome items. The pyjamas were particularly welcome. We had a washing machine in the sergeants' mess and every time I put in my pyjamas they came out two inches shorter. Right now I could wear them as jockey shorts. The sun smiles happily down upon us to-day so I plan on taking a stroll through Victoria Park this afternoon—one of the loveliest natural parks, incidentally, in Eastern Canada.

I am one of the few bachelors among the officers and N.C.O.s for which I thank my stars. Most of the married lads have their wives here and My God what a going over everybody in the unit gets when the wives' tongues start clacking together. A friend of mine (just married) had me over to his place the other night and his brand new wife told me more about the unit than I know myself. However I wrote Roy asking him to select me a suitable mate from Winnipeg's eligibles and send her wrapped in cellophane by parcel-post—prepaid. I said he could use his discretion in making the choice. Why shouldn't some deserving female get \$45.00 a month living allowance—or whatever it is—on the government?

My correspondence should be slightly better from now on because I recently bought a leather correspondence case with pigeon holes for stationery, stamps, letters, etc. It is my pride and joy. I took compassion on Marion's apparent monetary miseries and sent her a two dollar postal note for a pair of socks. Will try and manage that furlough—by the Grace of God—in August.

Cheers,

Don

24 July, 1943, Mulgrave, N. S.

Dear Folks:

Sorry to be so far behind in my correspondence. When I arrived back at Mulgrave about ten letters were waiting for me, none of which I have yet answered. At present I am on outpost duty at a pretty little spot along the coast. Not having a hell of a lot to do but sit in my office, I should be able to catch up over the week-end. My sergeant is taking the week-end off so I will be on duty.

Well, I imagine Marion has written you about our get together in Montreal. She is having a grand time. The four musketeers have a really charming suite in Mount Royal Town, overlooking a park and a stream. Modernistic and comfortable.

I have been shoved around so much lately I have a hard time keeping track of myself, my belongings and my pay (which is two weeks behind). My present job, I gather, is only temporary—but it is restful and pleasant. God knows who we are trying to scare out here on the coast.

My nearest neighbor is a Mrs. England who has thirteen children, one of whom, a personable wee chappie, is officially named Winston Churchill England. The family proudly displays a Christmas greeting from the great Winnie himself. Mrs. England by the way does my pressing.

I hope to God I get out of this coastal defence soon for either furlough or qualifying course; both still indefinite. What good am I here to the Canadians in Sicily?

Well, maybe another letter Sunday. I am hopeless without my typewriter which is still at Debert. So are my glasses, for repairs. I am stuck with these army monstrosities.

Cheers for now,
Don

July 25th, 1943, Mulgrave, N. S.

Dear Roy and Family:

When you get a letter from me in pencil, you must know I have a desperately guilty conscience.

I have been harried about so much of late that I can't remember for sure whether or not I wrote you from Fort William. Anyway, I was there at the funeral of one of our lads killed in an accident.

Spent two lively days in Montreal en route back with Marion and her gang of Home Economics beauties.

Am now stationed at Mulgrave and at the moment am on outpost duty on the coast. Very pleasant pastoral life with no one to fight but an imaginary enemy. I am only relieving an officer in hospital and will probably soon be back in the thick of the red tape at Mulgrave.

Meantime, until the boss calls me into Mulgrave, I am living a life of more or less pastoral ease. It is a pretty spot, but I'd hate to stay here long. Too remote from the realities of life and the realities of war. Glad to hear Peter thrives and lengthens. That August furlough is still maybe, so better not count on it.

Cheers,

Don

25 July, 1943, Mulgrave, N. S.

Dear Jim,

This is pastoral loveliness. I am lying on my back in shorts under a beneficent sun. To my front is water upon which sits a navy patrol boat ("Old Faithful"). Farther out an old sailing vessel, revived since the war, plies its lazy course. Off my quarter to port, another old aristocrat of the coastal trade comes about in the mild breeze. To my rear are sheep and a horizon. My next-door neighbor is a Mrs. England who has thirteen children, one of them dutifully named Winston Churchill. Winnie just brought me a uniform Mrs. England pressed and he then retired, ecstatically clutching a chocolate bar.

As you can no doubt gather, I am on outpost duty for a few blessed days. As John Bracken said of the Home Defense Army recently, I am "out of industry, out of agriculture, out of the war, out of everything but the public treasury."

I received your note (note I said) suggesting various week-ends, upon my return from Fort William, where I attended the funeral of one of our lads killed in an accident. Had two lively days in Montreal with Marion, who works now and then at Eaton's between intervals of hilarious parties and lazy summer resort week-ends. She and her young-lovely colleagues have a throttling grip on life and there is never—as the wit of the officers' mess would say—a dull moment. Marion's current squire seems a very decent level-headed sort.

Circumstances of course made it impossible for me to even acknowledge the week-end suggestions. Right now I can do nothing. Leave is also very nebulous. I was in Mulgrave one day. The next on the train for Fort William. Then back to Mulgrave. Then here (best of all). I am not doing intelligence work now because for some dark and incomprehensible reason Battalion Hq. is still at Debert. My O.C. at Mulgrave a P.F. Captain and terrifically aware of it—is an ass and a snob, wherefor I am grateful to be here, for even a brief spell.

If I am kept in Canada much longer, I shall be soft and ignorant when ready to go overseas. You certainly don't learn much defending the coast against a virtually imaginary enemy.

However I no longer worry about what comes next. One day at a time is enough in the Army. Have you Maugham's *Reader*, perchance? I'd love to lay hold of it.

Cheers for now,
Don

28 July, 1943, Mulgrave, N. S.

Dear Dottie:

Havink no typerider iss puttink averydink mit der hink ant pan. Iss hart for me. My! Get wrider's crap from der pan. I am on outpost dooty. Iss no one here but der sheep, cows, botes, feesh ant solchers. Nize sonshine and sinery. But no axcitemunts. Am looking averywhere for de Nasties and Japanists but find nottink. Meks me very sed. How iss Nancy, Juty, Wooty, and Sendy Hook. Gettink der leef iss like pullink der tooth. Very hart. Am givink a pardy here for my boys Settiday. Soch fun we'll be hevink. Barn dencink. Feedlink. Sweenging your pardners! Am looking forwards to!

Well, so much for HYMAN. I really enjoyed your letter and offer my usual apologies for being late in replying. This outpost duty is a marvellous relief after the redtape inferno at our headquarters in Mulgrave. God knows what they pay me for out here, but no one else seems to earn their money in this damn home defense army. If I don't get qualified and get overseas soon, I think I'll ask to go back to civil life so I can contribute to the war effort.

Had a swell time in Montreal with Marion and her highstepping satellites. I have decided to get married at the first opportunity so I can get more money out of the government. Besides, I'm lonely and need someone like a wife as an excuse for week-end leaves. Any suggestions? I have been thinking of proposing to one of my neighbor's daughters. This neighbor has thirteen children, and it seems only charitable to relieve her of one of them. This girl may not be able to read and write but after all I could do all of that that is necessary in the family. She can milk cows and I can't. Have done a bit of swimming but the local fisherman-philosopher tells me there are occasional sharks (about one a year).

"B'Jesus," he says, "I comes doon t'the boot one mornin', I does, and thar they wur; two great white sons-o-bitches o' sharks, sittin' thar sunnin' themselves right fair aft o' m'boot. Gord Jesus Christ I wur fair skeered to cross out ta m'boots with them big white bastards sittin thar in the shoals. Well, b'Jesus, them white sons-o-bitches sits thar fer two days, awaitin' on me. Yes, thar's sharks onct-in a-while but its them sons-o-bitches o' dogfish

that gives the trouble. Eats thar way fair through the nets the bastards does.” And so on. Marvellous entertainment. Well keed, time to listen to President Roosevelt’s speech. Will try to get that leave in August.

Cheers,

Don

11 August, 1943, Debert, N. S.

Dear Folks:

Well it won’t be long now. I expect to leave Saturday, Aug. 14th for Winnipeg, provided nothing unexpected intervenes. After Aug. 15th, the Third Battalion, Royal Winnipeg Rifles (CA) ceases to exist as a unit. Its personnel will be spread to the four corners of the world. This fortunate member, along with about eight or nine other unqualified officers, proceeds to Winnipeg. We are to be given leave until about the first of September, when we report to Camp Shilo for advanced training—thence, for those of us who are still young enough—overseas. Fortunately, through this change, I will miss O.T.C. altogether, which shortens my qualification course to one month. And it will be damn nice seeing Winnipeg and Sandy Hook once again.

Received your very welcome letter today, along with another equally welcome one from Dorothy. This place has been a terrible shambles for the past week with everyone celebrating the end of an era. I shall be glad to get on the train for a rest. As you see from the date line above, we are all back again at Debert. Incidentally Dan Renix’s unit is taking over our lines but Dan hasn’t shown up yet. All the rest of his gang are here.

Received a wire from the Admiral the other day—readdressed from Mulgrave—that he had been posted to Halifax so will try and get him on the telephone before I leave. Sorry to hear about Jean. Hope she weathers this latest piece of hacking without ill consequences. Received a very nice note from Agnes sometime ago thanking me for my letter of sympathy.

Glad you enjoyed my clowning. The little party I arranged at my outpost turned out very successfully. None of the lads would dance with the local girls—despite my frantic urgings as chief host—until some thoughtful person turned out the lights and switched to the hottest records in our collection. Then the fur flew and a good time was had by all.

Incidentally I went in swimming several times and despite the fisherman’s warning I never encountered a single “great white son-of-a-bitch

of a shark.” Hold everything. Shilo, here I come.

Cheers,

Don

21 September, 1943, Shilo, Man.

Dear Jim,

At long last, I have gotten myself around to answering your letter of Aug. 15th. Main reason for the long silence: one hell of a qualifying course which kept me burning the candle at both ends and amidst every day—Saturdays, Sundays and evenings included. It’s all over now but the shouting and the moaning. By the grace of God all our group from Debert got by, although 20% of the school will have to repeat the month (Unspeakable Horror).

At the moment I am lying gratefully on my backside awaiting posting, which may be to anywhere in this fair Dominion, including Debert. However it will only be a matter of months now before I go overseas as a reinforcement.

The Debert gang are vociferously engaged in poker in our room at the moment and everyone is feeling a bit glum at the prospect of our imminent splitting up. Hope some of us stick together, because, having been through so much Army dreariness together, we take satisfaction in crying on each other’s shoulders. I am sure we are the damnest gang of irreverent, non-conformist Junior Officers ever to come off the officer assembly line.

Spent a pleasant week-end at home after the course and received a very welcome gift of a watch from Pa. Life has been otherwise uniformly dull and still see no chance of furlough until I am posted.

Incidental Intelligence: George Ford is on Kiska; Dick is at Gibraltar (or was). Both Mart and Don Best are proud fathers. Col. Stevenson is dead. Gordie Major is here, awaiting draft. Marion likes her new job.

Enough for now, I’m being sucked into the poker game.

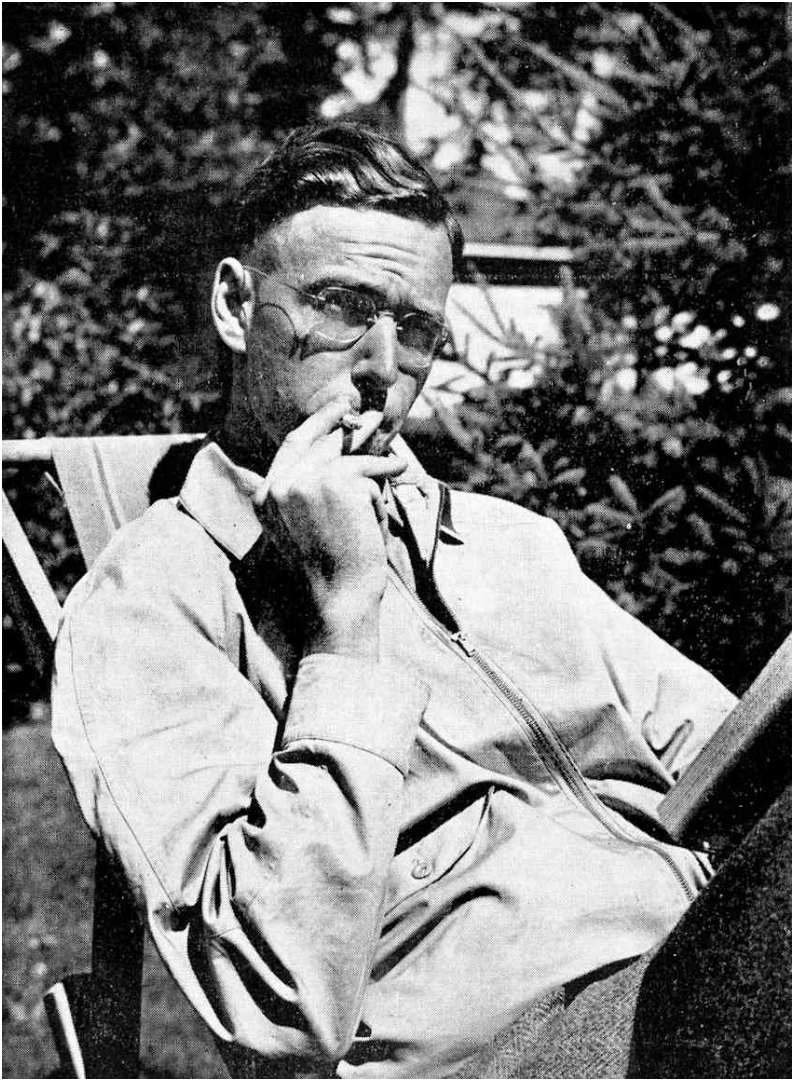
Cheers,

Don



ON LEAVE AT SANDY HOOK, AUGUST, 1943

(Roy Watson wrote about this snap, "I remember Don was reading 'The Human Comedy' and he would interrupt my reading to tell me of some observation of Mr. Grogan's or to read aloud some passage that particularly pleased him.")



LEAVE—AUGUST, 1943

C.P.R. en route to B. C., 27th Sept., 1943

Dear Jim;

En route again this time to the west coast. My lottery ticket upon completion of the course at Shilo read "Winnipeg Light Infantry," Esquimalt, B. C. So off come the trimmings of the Little Black Devils, and on go the Maple Leaves of my old Reserve Unit.

The W.L.I., I have good reason to believe, are all dressed up and ready to go, which means another chance at a furlough goes down the drain. "All this" as Frank Emma put it, "and Attu." Yes I feel I shall be spending the winter social season somewhere in that tourist area. Hope I'll get long enough in Victoria to look up some old friends. With me still—Frank Emma, Norm Anderson, T. McIvor. The other lads go to the Saint John Fusiliers, currently at New Westminster. Norm Anderson is very disappointed about the WLI deal. He was certain he was slated for Fort Garry, being 36 and supposedly Home War Establishment. Instead they send single lads to Fort Garry and pack poor Norm off to the "misty mid region of Weir," after he's seen his charming wife and children only a day or so.

From now on I'll be puffing gallantly along trying to keep up with the Blue Bomber football team, which makes up a good portion of the WLI officer personnel, including the Colonel (Harry Cotton). The WLI with all its athletes is "battle drill" crazy, a form of training for which I am well disposed but not very well organized. Ma and Pa are fine. Another friend of mine has had a baby but praise God the thing was asleep when I made my visit and I didn't have to see it. Everyone I know seems to be marrying, impregnating, and multiplying at an almost indecent pace.

Have bought \$200 Victory bonds toward that Emporia Gazette and will buy more if I sit on Kiska or somewhere very long. If I could improve my poker could do much better.

Saw Phil Lee's ecstatic creation in the *National Home Monthly*. He writes readable, acceptable, pap. Phyllis Coulter (Arni's sister) also had a page of drawings and children's verse in the same issue. She is a rare creature with a kindly, generous spirit, housed in a virtually immobile body. Friends go to her to give her a bit of cheer and it invariably works the opposite way. She gives *them* a lift.

Thanks for the Wolfe letter. It gave me an incentive to reread him for the sheer sense of delight at being alive he gives you. Enough for now. The train does not contribute to fluency or legibility.

Self-congratulatory note. Came 2nd in my class of 60 at Shilo on the written exams, which astonished me no end. It was one of the duller classes they've had for months. I was simply slightly less dull than most. However I am just as hopelessly unmilitary as ever, although I feel slightly less ludicrous with two pips instead of one.

My regards to Poole. Converted one of my colleagues to Saroyan via "*The Human Comedy*". Motion picture also excellent.

Cheers,

Don

(?) Oct., 1943, Courtenay, B. C.

Dear Jim:

Just a note to advise you that I am still on Canadian soil and am not likely to visit the misty mid region of Weir for quite some time. After Courtenay we go, I think, to Nanaimo, which is alright by me. Incidentally the four of us have been taken on strength which means we are now W.L.I.ers. You can only take what comes in the Army, but I would have preferred getting on draft for overseas. Under the new set-up this brigade is being stream lined for an active role somewhere in the Pacific. That, of course, would knock out any chance of getting to England. Naturally I would rather battle the Nazis in Italy on a diet of Chianti and spaghetti than hunt mad dogs in the Solomons on a diet of quinine and bananas, or hang about in fox-holes on Attu with nothing to do but enjoy the weather.

The rains came last night and brought tragedy (or should we call it comedy) to the officer personnel. A ripsnortin' norwester blew down three of our five marquees. Dawn broke on a dismal scene of mingled canvas, underwear, dress suits, shoe polish and anything else; everything wetter than the Pacific Ocean. By the grace of God my tent survived and I emerged unscathed. The previous evening we had trudged five miles through woods and swamp on a compass march. All in all it was a busy evening.

To-day all is quiet on the Courtenay front with most everybody off for week-ends.

The training is rather monotonous and repetitious. But that is the Army and we shall soon be at Nanaimo (I hope) which will be much pleasanter.

Thanks for adding my name to Ma's flowers. She was very touched.

Cheers,

Don

21st Oct., 1943, Courtenay, B. C.

Dear Jim,

Still busy here with “JANFUS” (Joint army and navy foul-ups) as they fondly term our schemes. Can you imagine me plunging into the surf at night with a bloody radio antenna sticking up over my shoulder and a sender in one hand? I feel like the Master Mind of Mars or an eccentric resident of Selkirk Mental Hospital. Will soon be at Nanaimo in comfortable quarters.

Cheers,

Don



SAILING THE "NANCY", AUGUST, 1943

1 Nov., 1943, Nanaimo, B. C.

Dear Jim:

Random thoughts from the West Coast. Nanaimo after Courtenay is strange Heaven after unbelievable Hell. Civilization has enveloped us again with all its beloved amenities such as warm food, warm beds, electric lights, and clean clothes.

Courtenay ended not with a whimper but with a bang. My Company embarked at 7.30 p.m., landed, (and it would have to be a wet landing) at 10 p.m. and we marched six straight hours through damnable, dark country pulling off the odd scheme en route. We then had an hour's rest—the ground was too wet and the weather too cold to sleep—and drifted over for a damp breakfast at five. Then plod, plod until seven o'clock the following evening. Five hour's sleep in 36 hours.

Grateful therefore for the more peaceful training schedule in store for us here. Think I will be furloughing in another couple of weeks, which is another stroke of good fortune I was not counting on. Nanaimo is not new to me. I spent three weeks here last fall on a gas course and it is a charming little town. Lovely harbor, magnificent trees, and a dignified background of mountains and hills. Best of all, I again enjoy the semi-privacy of a semi-private room.

Speaking of newspapers, how does the "Comox Free Press" strike you? Situated in the heart of the B. C. lumbering and fishing district, picturesque Courtenay in the fabulous Comox valley. Friendly people, marvellous country, high salaries, no unemployment (even in depression times). The idea made me so enthusiastic that I bought another Victory Bond.

Mother is home after a happy session with Marion and her gang. Think Dad was pretty lonely without her.

Do you ever get fed up with the incessant card games, childish conversation, and wearisome chaffing that go on wherever officers and gentlemen congregate? Maybe it's time I conformed to type and abandoned my futile habits of reading, thinking and dreaming. Oh wot the hell,

Cheers,

Don

Nov. 20th, 1943, Winnipeg

Dear J. L.

Back at the homestead with time to patch up my much neglected correspondence. Managed to scrounge a fairly decent leave out of the WLI, and am planning to spend part of it at the West Coast. Norm Anderson, Frank Emma and I splurged to come home in a drawing room. I felt I should have a hell of a lot more brass up to enjoy such luxury but I enjoyed it all the same.

Since arriving have been clucking at the latest babies and hearing the latest wedding gossip. Pretty soon Emma and I will be the only bachelor officers left in the WLI. There has been a marriage every weekend for the past month.

Better not send me any books because we may pull out of here any time and they'd be hard to dispose of. Re-read *Look Homeward Angel* which I borrowed from a Mrs. Kirby who runs a small library in Vancouver. She is a lively, charming, middle aged lady whose major vice or eccentricity consists of brewing her own beer in a little room behind her own library. Friend of Emma's sister. Intend to merely follow my whims and fancies for a week at home and try to shake off that feeling of being regimented. Glad you have something worth doing at Halifax and hope you get that chance at a cruiser.

Think we will be outward bound in the spring or just as likely earlier. Hope to hell it isn't to relieve the Canadians on Kiska; don't think so.

There are some good eggs in the gang and it is a nice life at Nanaimo while it lasts. Sunday before I left Anderson and I borrowed a couple of motor-bikes and went on a leisurely cruise of the country side. It was marvellous. Well, Ma has been slaving away over the oven for me, and the bird is just about ready.

Cheerio,

Don

17 Dec., 1943, Nanaimo, B. C.

Dear Peter Duncan:

Here it is Christmas again and I should like to take this opportunity to wish you the compliments of the season.

I understand from your worthy father that you are now beginning to explore the intricacies of the English language. Having your future benevolently in mind, I should like to give you a few helpful hints on mastering the tongue of Shakespeare and Milton.

Here's the point, Peter. Most children waste many precious years learning Spelling, Grammar, Composition, Elocution and Literature. I'm afraid I did too. But you don't need to. Your parents can probably tell you about many people who have got along nicely in France or Germany with only a phrase-book containing the necessary French and German phrases to see them through. Why not do the same thing with English? Is it of any conceivable use to you to know how to spell "pneumonia?" . . . or to be able to distinguish between a dangling participle and a split infinitive? . . . or to know that Lord Byron was a gay blade and swam the Hellespont? . . . or to be able to write a composition on "How I spent my vacation?" . . . or that Shakespeare wrote: "Sirrah, methinks thou art a knave?" No, Peter, no one is going to send you to jail if you say "It is me" instead of "It is I." And no one is going to ask you whether John Milton, John Bracken or John the Baptist wrote *Paradise Lost*.

Alright, here's the idea, Peter. I, out of the goodness of my heart and the fertility of my brain, am going to give you a little concentrated guide-book to the English language. You can call it, if you like, "All you Need to Know about English to Succeed."

Now I am going to be very practical about this thing, Peter. All I am going to teach you is what you need to know. I don't know what profession you are going to adopt, so I am going to give you the important phrases for each profession, plus a few extra sentences you will need to know to fit into the social world.

If you can master the following simple phrases, you will be able to carry on a normal conversation and lead a successful commercial life. And you won't even have to go to school.

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ENGLISH TO SUCCEED

As a Doctor

1. All you need is fresh air, rest and regular meals.
2. Take these pills after every meal.
3. You can pay the girl at the desk as you go out.

As a Politician

1. And how is *your* youngest coming along?
2. I believe in a square deal for labor (to capitalists).
3. I believe in a square deal for capital (to labor).
4. I believe in sound *business*-like government (to an audience).
5. What is there in it for me?

As an Insurance Salesman

1. I'd like to talk to you about your future some time.
2. How would you like a little nip?
3. Are you giving your wife a square deal?
4. You can't live forever, you know.
5. Just sign here, please.

As a Dentist

1. Open a little wider, please.
2. This may hurt just a little.
3. Spit out, please.
4. Will tomorrow at three be alright?
5. (See 3 under Doctor).

As Retail Salesman

1. This is our finest stock, lady.
2. Just feel that material yourself.
3. Can I show you anything else?
4. Will you take it with you?
5. The lavatory is on the second floor.

As a Policeman

1. Where's the fire, Buddy?
2. You just come along with me.
3. Oh Yeah.
4. Tell that to the judge.
5. Alright, move along.

As A Soldier

1. Yes, sir.
2. No, sir.
3. Right, sir.

As a Clergyman

1. I pronounce you man and wife.
2. I christen thee Peter Duncan Watson.
3. Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend this Spirit.
4. Don't forget the red half of the envelope.
5. I haven't seen your smiling face in church for quite sometime.
6. It's the will of God.
7. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

8. Page 24 in your hymn book.

As a Bus Driver

1. Move well back in the bus, please.

As a Lawyer

1. There's much to be said on both sides of the question.
2. Let's look at it from another angle.
3. In one respect that is so, but in another respect it is not so.
4. I always ask for my fee in advance.

As a Milkman

1. Same as usual, Ma'am?

As an Evangelist

1. Have you found Jesus, Mister?

For Social Purposes

1. Nice day, isn't it?
2. Nasty day, isn't it?
3. And how is the wife?
4. I think I will have a little snort.
5. What can you expect from this government.
6. Have you heard the one about?
7. Thanks, I had a lovely time.
8. Give me a call some time.
9. Do drop in some time.
10. Just imagine!

For Purposes of Making Love

1. Where have you been all my life?
2. Let's go places and do things.
3. I love you. (To be used only when you've made up your mind).

For Preserving Domestic Tranquility

1. I was held up at the office.
2. I brought you a little present, dear.

So there you have it, Peter, English in a nutshell—all you need to know about your own language in order to succeed in life.

You'll be sent to school anyway. Simply because there's nothing else to do with children.

Merry Christmas,
Uncle Don

[Written on a Wpg. Light Infantry Christmas card
Dec., 1943]

J. L.

This will probably arrive about New Year's. But what the hell. Received your Thurber yesterday and it is new to me—and very welcome. Will you take a rain check on your present? I left everything to the last moment and found myself with very little shopping-time. Visited J. R. Murray in Victoria and he rationed me a portion of his precious rye. Also Hugh Stephen, next door neighbor, a staff Captain "Q" branch. Also Wynne Campbell, where I was royally dined by him and his very charming wife. Wynne is a dental officer.

Getting back to the army routine has been awful after leave. It's a continual battle against boredom unless bullets are flying. I am leaving for Vernon, 2 Jan. I think for an anti-tank 6 pounder battle course. Expect to be deaf when it's over! Hope you have a good time in New York.

Cheers,

Don

Dec. 25th, 1943, Nanaimo, B. C.

Dear Folks,

Well, here it is Christmas Day and your soldier son is all alone in a vast and messy orderly room. Orderly Officer! Such are the uses of adversity. Being orderly officer on Christmas is one of the penalties of being single. They had a lottery in the mess among the *single* officers and officers whose wives are not here (there aren't many) as to who should have that tiresome chore. I won, to use one of our phrases, the blue-ribboned urinal.

I also spent a quiet Xmas Eve, avoiding the vintages in the knowledge that I would have a dreary day ahead. It certainly doesn't look like Christmas outside. It's like a day in early September in Winnipeg—bright sun, mild breeze, too warm for anything more than battle dress.

I was sorry to learn you had been down with the flu, Mother, but Dad tells me you had the best of attention so I didn't worry about you. Hope you were able to be up and around on Xmas and received my greeting O.K. Dad. Thanks for the razor-blades. I will think kindly thoughts of you during every shave for the next three months. Marion, thank you for the *super* gloves, which look magnificently warm and dressy. Sorry I had to take the easy way out in selecting yours and mother's present. Left poor Dad out altogether but will see what I can do in Vancouver.

I leave on Monday or Tuesday for Vancouver and then will be obliged to leave New Year's Eve—of all times—for Vernon, B. C., where I will be for five weeks. Which means I miss both Xmas and New Year's. Nice, eh? But not so bad as the lot of the poor guys in the fox-holes.

Just occurred to me that Marion will be gone by the time this letter reaches you. Or will she? If she is I'll write her a separate letter a little later. Sent Peter Duncan another Xmas letter, which Roy might read to you some day when you see him.

Mother, I'm sorry I failed to observe your birthday, particularly when you were ill. I knew it came in December, but I'm damned if I could remember what day it was. So look for a birthday present some time around February or March.

Well, the main thing is, may you both enjoy good health and good spirits during 1944, which, let's hope, may see the end of the war. HAPPY NEW

YEAR.

Love,

Don

25 Dec., 1943, Nanaimo, B. C.

Dear Jim:

Was sitting here in the orderly room as orderly officer (my Xmas present from the WLI) right on the job to receive your wire. Intended to reply in kind but decided to write instead, so will answer your promised letter before receiving it.

Christmas on this coast has been quiet for me. Avoided the vintages last night in fear of having to endure the weary monotony of orderly duty with a hangover. Will have about three days in Vancouver next week, but unfortunately will have to spend New Year's Eve enroute from Vancouver to Vernon, arriving New Year's day. I have been transferred to Support Coy, (my third company) and upon my return will be anti-tank platoon commander for a while. Nothing is very permanent in the Army. I can safely guess that after Vernon my address will be Prince George, B. C.

Owe you a Xmas present, incidentally, which I will endeavor to pick up in Vancouver. Sent Marion and Mother cash (the easiest way out) and wired flowers Xmas Eve. Sorry to hear Mother had quite a nasty bout with the flu but expect Marion's presence cheered her up considerably.

How was New York? Didn't run into Damon Runyan on Broadway did you or get tangled up with one of his dolls in a speakeasy? Enjoyed Thurber immensely. Sometimes I think I see life through the same thick lensed spectacles as Thurber.

There is still much talk of our going to the South Pacific with the Americans this spring. Many are cynical about our possibilities of seeing action but I rather think we will go somewhere, whether we do anything or not. Guess I'll have to get married one of these days to find some occupation for my spare time. How about you picking out some nice bright newspaper girl who could help us run the Burlington Bugle when we acquire it?

Anyway HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Don

5 Jan., 1944, Vernon, B. C.

Dear Dot:

Please don't expect this to be a letter. That would be too much of a chore after scrambling about in 12 inches of snow all day. I am one vast ache-and-pain from the toes up. But don't be alarmed. This course settles down after to-day to gentler pursuits. Thank you dear for the undies. They are truly beautiful and I needed them badly. Hope the youngsters got their gifts and they fit.

Saw George Ford and Pat the other night—dinner at their miniature mansion in Vernon. Ford tried an ingenious omelet which failed him. Made palatable scrambled eggs however.

I'll be here about five weeks, after which Prince George. One really gets around in the Army. As usual I am located next to two of the most pleasant, loquacious, congenial bores that ever graced the khaki service. Elderly duffers, they talk army all night long. Well, bed and a magazine invite my battered carcass with an irresistible appeal. Norm Anderson is on a *mountain climbing* course at Terrace. He was nearly frantic when he got the news!

Cheers,

Don

His ruling passion was the practical application of the principle of freedom, and he pursued it remorselessly through the infinitely tangled skein of human affairs. No man had a firmer grip of the idea of liberty; no man had a clearer conception of the difficulties in maintaining and strengthening it.—Winnipeg Free Press editorial on John W. Dafoe, 10 Jan., 1944.

11 Jan., 1944, Vernon, B. C.

Dear Dad;

Just read of J. W. Dafoe's death and would appreciate your sending me all the news and editorial matter which appear in the *Free Press* in that connection—also the *Tribune* editorial. Bruce Hutchison in to-day's *Vancouver Sun*, describes him as the "greatest Canadian of our time."

Thanks for your recent note. By the way be sure and address mail as above. One letter addressed to Vernon went first to Nanaimo because the address wasn't complete. Just got Dot and Woody's wire to-day! It seemed to have been held up a little. Better late than never though. Partied Saturday night with Pat, George and a girl friend they produced for me. Good

evening. All goes well at Vernon. Lots of work and little excitement. But pleasant. Tell Mother I was glad to receive her letter and will write soon after she returns from Saskatoon. Hope you both enjoy the trip. This note (and let's hope another) should be waiting when you get back. If you have any trouble digging up the Free Press stuff the Circulation Dept. should oblige.

Cheers,
Don

I am terribly afraid—I must tell you this—but I know that when the time comes I shall do what is expected of me and maybe even more than is expected of me, but I want you to know that I shall be obeying no command other than the command of my own heart.—“The Human Comedy.”

16th Jan., 1944, Vernon, B. C.

Dear Mother,

Received your letter from Regina and am glad to know you are back in good health and have enjoyed your trip. Pat and George Ford have made me very welcome, and I have dropped in on them several times, usually leaving with one of George's books under my arm. They are a very happy and devoted couple.

Too bad your old Aunt slipped away on you before you could have a last get together. Time waits for no man.

My main inconvenience here has been not receiving the *Free Press* or the *New Yorker* magazine. Asked Dad for the *Free Press* matter on J. W. Dafoe. If you run across a *New Yorker* any time please pass it along to me. Will be here until about Feb. 6th when I leave for Prince George, B. C. Have met several people who knew Aunt Lu well in her Hudson's Bay days here.

The only trouble with Vernon is that there is almost nothing to do in the way of entertainment. All of the dances, the beer parlors and several of the restaurants are out of bounds for officers. There is one movie which I attend twice a week religiously to pass the time.

My work consists partly of helping to haul a 1700 pound six-pounder over hills and down dales, a type of employment for which I am not very well fitted either by physique or inclination. Taking the thing apart and putting it together again is an unspeakable horror for an unmechanical

person like myself. Others in the detachment immediately dive for long-familiar nuts and bolts, and I peer disconsolately at the ugly apparition wondering how I can make myself useful. Too bad I haven't been more interested in the intestines of cars in civil life like most fellows. I sometimes think I could make a much more useful contribution to the war effort in the Salvation Army or tapping out propaganda on a typewriter. However I'm not the only unwarlike person in the Army and I guess when it comes to action I'll be alright. Must write Jim and two or three other people.

Love,

Don

16th Jan., 1944, Vernon, B. C.

Dear Jim:

Herewith a long delayed reply to your interesting account of your land-sea-air trip to New York and back. Where were those famous Navy pills which are supposed to prevent seasickness?

I am spending a quiet Sunday, catching up on letters and awaiting with little enthusiasm to-morrow's ploughing through the snow with a six-pounder. My stay at Vernon so far has been very quiet. The only persons I know are Pat and George Ford who have made me very welcome. George came back from Kiska with the advance party. Remainder of his unit returns this weekend. They are a very happy bookish couple—a refreshing contrast to the usual officer-wife team I have encountered in the Army. Borrowed Wolfe's *Letters* from George. Also *Great Letters* (second collection) which contains many gems. Followed this by reading Yank Levi's *Guerilla Warfare*, to try and get a few pointers to assist me in dealing with the wily Jap.

I am completely fed up and bored with the army life and find it increasingly difficult to retain interest in courses dealing with the art of killing. What I need I know is some sort of baptism of fire to give this job some sort of meaning and put me back into the picture.

Having nothing much to do here after the day's work but meditate, I have done considerable serious thinking about how the hell I want to earn my living after the war, and analyzing my abilities and temperament. The newspaper idea, I think, is the best bet for me at any rate, and I have started a definite program of saving toward that end. It has certain disadvantages, for one thing it is not the road to success in the ordinary interpretation of that word; for another, it exposes you to the danger of acquiring the

parochial point of view. But I am convinced I would be foolish to go back to the metropolitan field. I will have been left too far behind in experience as a result of the army, and I am not suited by temperament for the haste and frenzy of that type of work. I am also convinced I am too much of an individualist to be much good as an employee. I want to run my own show.

I have never concentrated my energies on one job for any length of time. Such drifting about can be good experience but it can also become a pernicious habit. My own paper would provide a salutary anchor. All this is of course highly visionary at this time. So much for seeing life clearly and seeing it whole, for which I hope you will forgive me.

I am not sure whether you would be happy in such a venture. It might seem drudgery with small reward to you rather than good fun. I don't know. But you could always have a whack at it and duck out of it if it didn't appeal to you. Anyway the time is long distant.

I am studying the six-pounder here, which consists mostly of taking it apart, putting it together, and pushing it around the country on tactical schemes. Anything mechanical is terrifying to me but I am gradually getting familiar with its iron lungs and semi-automatic heart.

Suppose you read of J. W. Dafoe's death. Bruce Hutchison wrote a very wise and moving tribute to him in the Vancouver Sun. Drop me a line again when you capture the mood.

Cheers,

Don

19 Jan., 1944, Vernon, B. C.

Dear Dorthy,

No time for long wridinks. Tenking you only for vunderful bertday sigrats. Iss for smokink now all day lonk. Your New Year's vire iss comink bout two wiks lade. Dosentz madder. Same santiments . . . no? Iss tinkink boud me enyvays. Vorkink hart at six-poundor. I walk all day in da sno. Wad end nesty but nize varm vedder. Hopink you iss halty and all kinds heppy.

H-Y-M-A-N

X X X kisses for Nancy and Juty.

January 19, 1944, Vernon, B. C.

Dear Roy:

Just realized as I recorded the date above that this is my birthday. Fancy that! Unpredictable as usual, I am answering your letter the very day I received it. Otherwise it will go unanswered for weeks. Consider yourself highly favored if you like.

You alarmed me some by taking my whimsical nostalgia for an ordered existence fairly seriously. As a matter of fact I think I am now, more or less, married to a purpose—the desire to own and operate a small newspaper after the war, for which, believe it or not, I am actually saving money. However, I still owe allegiance to the graceless bride of war but will be pleased to divorce her when the lights go on again all over the world.

Don't compare me to Thomas Wolfe. He had a mission in life which he was in the midst of fulfilling when the dynamo inside him ceased to charge and he died. Incidentally, Wolfe's Letters to his Mother are extremely good reading, if you run across them.

I shall never mention marriage to you again in a letter, since Bette reads them. She is an incorrigible match maker and would fasten irrevocable pinions upon me if given a free hand. Bette would like to see me anchored to the fireside, sold out to the pipe and slippers, cabin'd, cribbed, confined, bound in to the kitchen, duped into domesticity, enamoured of infants, moored to matrimony, bemused by boudoir, bedroom and bambinos. Bette, you are a femme fatale, a menace, a greater threat to my freedom than fascism. All the same, I hope your nefarious designs are one day successful. For I would make a loving, if lamentable, husband. Who is the girl you hint would contemplate hitching her wagon to this dubious star?

Roy, thanks for the *Free Press* on J. W. Dafoe. As a matter of fact, you anticipated my want (as you so often do) because I had written home asking for that issue but later learned the folks were away. I thought Bruce Hutchison's piece was a masterful and fully deserved tribute.

Congratulations on the raise. You no doubt deserved it and the hard-pressed government will put it to good use in the war effort. Will be glad to see Arni at Prince George. Saw him for only a few moments in Vancouver at New Year. Life goes quietly at Vernon. Glad to hear David thrives (Peter D. —what the hell. I'm even getting the babies mixed up) and enjoyed his letter.

Give my regards to Liz and El. Wrote Irv last week, figuring he might get a bit homesick once in a while. You must write him too, old man. It's a great morale booster. Expect the old boilermaker will have a seat at the opening of the second (or third) front.

Cheers,

Don

Give my greetings to Phyl, will you?

7th Feb., 1944, Kelowna, B. C.

Dear Folks,

Spending a few days leave here prior to plunging away into the north land—Prince George. Kelowna is one of the loveliest little towns I've ever seen, situated on a beautiful lake surrounded by hills. It is apparently famous for its water sports in the summer. Wouldn't mind settling down here on the *Kelowna Courier*. Had a chat with the editor of it to-day.

This hotel is typically English and is peopled by some frightful old ghouls who drift mysteriously about in velvet and old lace or brindle tweeds.

The weather has been perfect to-day—almost like summer and I went for a long walk through the lovely park alongside the lake. I don't see how anyone can willingly return to live in Manitoba after experiencing the greater glories of B. C.

The next few months will be pretty quiet—mostly hard work climbing mountains and living out, etc., but thank goodness the cold weather will soon be over. Will write again from P. G. when I arrive. Hope you are both well. Thanks for the *Free Press*, etc., Dad.

Love,

Don

12th Feb., 1944, Prince George, B. C.

Dear Folks,

Here to-day and gone tomorrow. That's the way it is with me these days. Just arrived at P. G. and learn that I am to go to Terrace (not very far away), for a three-week mountain climbing course. So address any mail to me after the 20th or so to Cdn. Mountain Warfare School, Terrace, B. C. Lord knows I have none of the tastes or instincts of a mountain goat but I guess I'll have to acquire them. They let you down cliffs and things by a rope which sounds extremely unpleasant. However will have the pleasure of looking up an old friend of mine there, Ted Burch, who is instructing.

Prince George seems alright. Our quarters are excellent, steam-heated of all things. The American touch. Mother, received your letter dated Feb. 1

only to-day. It apparently chased me to Vernon, to Nanaimo, and then here. Will definitely write Marion this week. Nothing much new so we'll let it go at that for now.

Cheers,

Don

12 Feb., 1944, Prince George, B. C.

Dear Jim:

You generally write the damndest shortest letters I ever receive with the exception of bills and notices of the monthly meeting of the Wpg Young Men's Liberal Association—to which I never belonged.

Thanks for Lippman on William Allen White. Also read John Bird on White, a tribute to his "forever beloved boss". Who knows but what you or I might not achieve equal fame with the Snarksborough Sentinel. Speaking of weeklies I chewed the fat with various personnel on the *Vernon News* and the *Kelowna Courier*—two beautifully printed and profitable rags in the Okanagan Valley. Out of our class though—probably worth \$35000. Kelowna is one of the most beautiful spots south of Heaven, nestled against a deep blue mountain lake guarded on all sides by the Rockies. Famous for its annual aquatic carnival which attracts many of our American neighbors. Spent a quiet four day leave there after Vernon.

Will be going to Terrace, B. C., shortly for a three week mountain climbing course. From what I understand this consists mostly of ascending sheer cliffs with ropes and dangling over precipices. Nice for adventure lovers but a trifle disquieting for sedentary souls such as I.

Have been reading a bit more lately—Koestler's *Dialogue with Death* (fascinating prison stuff), Maugham's shorts, (engaging as always), Eliot Paul's *Life and Death of a Spanish Town* (as good as *The Last Time I Saw Paris*), Nathan's *Bachelor Life*—sophisticated and mildly cynical; Saroyan, naive and abounding in faith and glory. All respite from the gloom of soldiering.

Beginning to think this Pacific deal may fold and I yet will land in England as a reinforcement when the push starts. Much better to fight at least a semi-civilized army. Well that's about all the news you deserve and all my weary brain (wearied by a route march, if such is possible) can conjure up.

Cheers,

Don

P.S. Passed a \$20.00 bill recently in Jasper as a one (same color). So I am still capable of the enormous stupidities for which I claim a somewhat dubious fame.

March 1, 1944, Terrace, B. C.

Dear Folks,

Well, I'm still struggling along in a gallant effort to transform myself from a sedentary pants polisher to an alpine mountaineer. We had a bad couple of days this week which you might be interested in hearing about, now that we are back, safe and snug, in camp.

We set out for an overnight expedition to the top of Thorn Hill. It was a hell of a climb, carrying on our pack boards the following items—sleeping bag, snowshoes, steel helmet, rifle and pack containing clothing and cooking utensils. Oh yes, I also carried a hand axe.

Well, we staggered up the 6000 feet somehow or other. Beyond the timber line a furious snow storm was blowing, and the temperature dropped to about 30 below. For four hours we dug our snow caves, then had supper. By this time the snow was drifting so fast the entrances to our caves were filling up as fast as we could dig them out. Another officer and I decided it would be sheer foolishness to sleep in the caves, because we would have had to dig ourselves out in the morning and without air holes, there was a good chance of smothering. So Duffie and I decided to hell with it, we would take a chance on freezing to death and try and get down to the timber line. However by this time the platoon commander had realized how serious the situation was, and ordered the entire school to pack up and head down. I don't mind admitting I was damned relieved—and so were a lot of others. The trip down to the lower bivouac area was a ghastly horror, but we made it O.K. and slept in comparative comfort, out of danger. There were only a few of us who had enough common sense to realize how hopeless the snow cave business was under those conditions.

There were nineteen cases of frostbite (two hospitalized). I was one of them (the minor cases) with a frozen wrist—nothing serious. One man collapsed from exhaustion, two cut themselves with hand axes. The next day we marched down, weary and miserable. All in all it was an unhappy party. However it was an interesting experience and there won't be any more of that nonsense.

Rock climbing still scares me stiff, but I am getting a little more sure-footed and confident. However, we'll all be pleased when the course is over. I can't see what it has to do with soldiering, except for alpine units.

Don't be alarmed if this story sounds a bit grim. The worst is over and our five-day outing next week (*not* above the timber line) should be fairly good fun. Have received all the *New Yorkers* now, and they were as welcome as water on the desert. Leave here for Prince George March 11th, so please govern your mail accordingly.

Frostbittenly yours,
Don

A soldier, and brave. . . . Mann's "Magic Mountain."

March 11th, 1944, Terrace, B. C.

Dear Jim,

Thanks for your long and entertaining letter. It reached me rather late for this reason: there was 8 cents postage due and the camp post office here held it for two weeks (while I was out on various schemes) until I found a chance to get down town and pick it up.

I have just completed a three weeks' mountain warfare course which was the most memorable and nightmarish three weeks in my experience. The last five days consisted of a mountain climbing trip which turned out to be pretty grim. It's rather an interesting story so I'll tell you about it.

We left Monday, carrying 60 pound pack boards (sleeping bag, clothing, rations, snowshoes, parkas, grampons, shoe packs, etc.). In civil life I wouldn't carry the damned monstrosity as far as the corner store but Monday I marched 8 miles, over an indescribably rough trail and then climbed 4,000 feet to our base camp! You could never imagine the suffering it was for me to get there (being much lighter in build than most).

The climb was nearly straight up in snow two feet deep. We arrived at 9 o'clock in the evening. For the last four hours we walked five minutes, then rested five. I am not exaggerating when I say that I went the last 500 yards mostly on hands and knees I was so exhausted.

The next day was even worse. Wearing snow shoes (and later ice grampons) we assaulted the summit of Maroon Mt. (6,800 ft.). It was proper hell. Near the top you could barely cling to the rock surface because of the

terrific wind and blinding stinging snow. With only 3/4 of an hour to go I had to be taken back because both my wrists were frozen.

The third day the fun *really* began. The plan was to cross Maroon peak with all equipment, descend the other side and set up camp in Maroon Valley. We were to pitch camp about 4 p.m. We pitched camp at 4 *a.m.* the following morning, carrying our infernal pack boards all the time.

We had one climb almost straight up, wearing snow shoes and cutting steps in the snow. The route down the other side had never been “recc’ed” (reconnaissance) and the only way down was through a dangerous couloir, (sort of a gorge). The leading elements no sooner got started down the couloir than they were caught by a snowslide. I would have been caught too but (as usual) I had straggled behind my section from exhaustion. The slide caught the Major and about 14 men. Most of them got out in time but five lads were swept down about 3/4 of a mile at about 30 miles an hour and buried in the snow. Miraculously all managed to dig themselves out. One chap had a leg broken in two places. The others had only minor cuts and bruises. Meanwhile the remainder waited up top (not knowing the fate of the fellows caught in the slide) for an hour and a half while a safety line was laid for about 500 yards down the couloir.

Down below, the lads who dug themselves out of the snow improvised a splint and stretcher and evacuated the casualty to a safe spot. The casualty then had to be taken down the mountain and along the valley about 5 miles, before the field ambulance section took over. Three different stretchers (each an improvement on the last) were used. Everyone did their bit. Some places the stretcher had to be lowered over ravines by ropes. I would not have believed the job possible but it was done.

Now about myself. It took most of us from 5 p.m. until 3 a.m. to reach the first bivouac area, the trail along the valley was hideous. Every 20 yards there would be a fallen tree. You had to go either under or over. We crossed the creek twice (knee deep in mountain water).

By midnight I was all in. One of the snowslide victims who was unhurt (a good lad) was with me and without his help I would never have made it. Every 50 yards or so I would trip and would be too exhausted to get up with my 60-pound pack. He would haul me up, give me a shove and I would stagger along another 50 yards and collapse again.

To complete this tale of woe I might as well tell you about the overnight scheme on Thorn Hill the previous week. The idea was to spend the night in snow caves. Well, the snow was drifting so fast we couldn’t keep the

entrances to the caves clear. It was finally decided (at midnight) that the caves were not safe so we packed up and went down to the timber line.

Just imagine trying to come down a mountain in the dark with a howling wind and the temperature about 30 below. It was some trip.

Now that the course is over I have to pinch myself to realize I am still alive. Our experiences are not typical of course. We simply had bad luck, bad weather and the senior officer took unwarranted risks (he's one of these insufferable enthusiasts).

It's strange how your sense of values is altered by circumstances. When I was completely "pooped" crossing Maroon peak my Pl. Sgt. gave me four prunes. They were like manna from heaven. Even a few raisins would give you enough energy for another couple of hundred yards. I would have given a month's pay during that crossing for a chocolate bar. Some lads (not many) took everything in their stride. I'm afraid I haven't got the build for that sort of thing.

It's wonderful to be back in a warm room, even though I am all aches and pains, have blood poisoning in a cut finger and have two frozen wrists. Another W.L.I. Officer has a horrible pair of wrists (he could not go on the scheme). Another is in hospital with frozen hands. (May lose a finger or two.)

However, J. L., army life in Canada is generally pretty soft and this sort of thing is what we need to shake us out of our complacency.

I envy you your chance to associate at least occasionally with persons who have read a book, maybe read a poem or listen to a good piece of music. Interests here don't extend much beyond athletics, poker (at which I am getting pretty cunning), and horseplay. One bright young W.L.I. officer (Harry Crowe, friend of J. D. Hamilton) organized a discussion club some time ago, and about 6 of us (the Dental Officer, the M.O., Crowe, the padre, myself and 2 others) "discussed" the Halifax speech on Canadian Autonomy.

A number of West coast officers are being attached to the Imperial Army under the new plan you may have heard about. I may get in on it sooner or later. Another officer of ours has gone to Hawaii with the American Army. I think I should get somewhere before the spring is out.

Prince George has a paper alright but I think we could do better than that. There's no doubt about this—B. C. is the country to live in. I'm through with the prairie.

Enclosed a snap showing some of the work we did on this course. Above, a “casualty” is being lowered over a cliff side (it’s a funny feeling). Below a lad is making the “Tyrolean Traverse.” Incidentally I had the stuffing scared out of me at least a dozen times on this rock work.

Enough for now,

Cheers,

Don

11 March, 1944, Terrace, B. C.

Dear Folks,

Just returned from a five day scheme which completed this course and was glad to get a letter from home, one from Dorothy, one from Jim, and one from Roy Watson. The jack-pot.

I just wrote Jim a long letter describing our experiences on the five day scheme. I don’t feel like describing the nightmarish trip again so I’ll only give the highlights. *Monday*—9 a.m. to 9 p.m. marched 8 miles, then climbed 4000 feet in deep snow, carrying a 60 lb. pack (on my thin shoulders). Was never so exhausted in all my life. *Tuesday*—Climbed to the top of Maroon Peak, wearing parkas, snowshoes, and (near the top) grampons, which are steel spikes which fasten on to your shoes. Froze my other wrist and was again exhausted. *Wednesday*—Left at 9 a.m. to cross Maroon Mountain and set up camp in Maroon Valley. Supposed to arrive at 4 p.m. Arrived at 4 a.m. the following morning. Held up by difficult terrain, the weather and a snowslide which caught 14 men. Most of them got out of it but five were carried down more than half a mile at about 30 miles an hour, and were buried in the snow below. Miraculously, all were near the surface and dug themselves out. One chap had both bones in his leg broken. The others only minor cuts and bruises.

Evacuating the casualty down the mountain on an improvised stretcher was a terrific job that would appear almost impossible. But it was done. I was so exhausted around midnight that when I fell or tripped I couldn’t get up. A chum of mine, walking behind, would pick me up, give me a shove, and I would stagger along another 100 yds, when I would again trip, or have to go on hands and knees under a fallen tree and would not have the strength to get up. My trouble was, I am too light of frame to handle the huge packboard successfully. However I finally made camp and it’s all over now. Frank Emma and a few others didn’t even attempt the crossing knowing they would never make it.

To-day I leave for Prince George, all aches and pains, frozen wrists and blood poisoning in one finger. But I got off easily. A couple of others collapsed from exhaustion and one of our officers has a horrible pair of frozen wrists. Another lad may lose a couple of fingers. All in all, it was sheer hell. No more mountain climbing for me, thank you. I don't even want to go up in an elevator again. Am sending you some snaps one of the instructors took of our rock work with explanations on the back.

Sorry to hear about Jack Broder; another name struck off my dwindling friends and acquaintances. Please convey my sympathies. Well, Emma and I are going into town (such as it is) to dig up a steak dinner, (meals here aren't so hot); later we catch the train to Prince George. So that's all until I find out what new adventures they have in store for me.

Love,

Don

P.S. Mother; Enclosed a finn. Take a taxi downtown. Dine at the Bay. Go to a movie. Taxi home. Those are my orders.

En route Terrace, B. C.—Prince George
14th March, 1944

Dear Sis [Dorothy]:

Thanks for your letter which I received upon returning from our five day nightmare in the mountains. Gave Mother some of the dope about my experiences on the scheme which she can pass on to you if you are interested.

It was plenty tough on me but even tougher on poor brother Emma. You should have seen Frank straggling into camp the first night about ten o'clock under his 60 pound pack. For the previous two hours he had been stumbling along ten steps, resting a minute, then poking along another leg or two. He has a new theory for mountain climbing, throw away your rations, he says, climb up to the top on mule, then kill and eat the mule. Simple eh?

Frank didn't attempt the grim crossing of Maroon peak so he was at the main base when he got word of the snowslide (Mother will tell you about it). His party got the exaggerated story that an entire section had been carried under. So Frank and a corporal abandon their stew, and off they go on horses along the lake trail to try and give what help they could. Frank said it was so damn dark he couldn't see the horse's feet and when it went up a slope he nearly fell off the back. Every once in a while the horse would step into the

lake for a drink and Frank would clutch the reins madly to keep from toppling off the *front*.

Of course they never got anywhere near the scene of the snowslide and weren't needed anyhow but they didn't know that. Frank says that if he had ever started up the slope there would have been four more casualties—himself, the corporal, and the two horses.

Well, it's all over now, and I am happy and content after a delicious breakfast on the train. Incidentally, I lost 6 pounds on the course which leaves me skinnier than ever, so I intend to eat my head off for a couple of weeks.

Tell Woody not to go about bullying people in his fancy dress [R.C.M.P. Reserve] uniform. Above all he must not stop motorists, snarl, and demand "Where's the fire buddy?" Glad to hear Nancy forges ahead at school, and has found Jesus. Give the tykes my regards.

Received a long newsy letter from Jim full of gossip about books, authors he has met and interesting people. I wish I could trade jobs. It would be sure a laugh to see Jim plodding along in snow-shoes, parka, shoe packs, under a 60 pound pack. I'm a pitiable enough sight myself, according to Glen Cardinal, who picked me up at least a dozen times, kicked me in the rear to start me breathing, and gave me a shove to start me moving. Don't need anything in particular old dear, but a box of goodies occasionally is a pleasant treat.

Sorry to hear about Broder, and the many others I know who have disappeared into the bottomless pit that is War.

Cheers,

Don

15th March, 1944, Prince George, B. C.

Dear Marion;

Seems to me your birthday is either March 7th or March 18th or March something so enclosed a small gift with which you could buy a pair of silk stockings if there were any silk stockings. Just finished a Mountain Warfare course at Terrace, B. C., which really set me back on my heels. What with frozen wrists, a 60 pound pack, treacherous snow houses, blizzards, below zero weather and snowslides, it was by no means a picnic.

McCririck appears to be a lively, adventurous bloke, with plenty of joie de vivre, and is undoubtedly handsome as Clark Gable in his air force uniform.

Understand you are sending Dorothy Jello, to keep her children from starving. A noble and filial gesture. Heard from all the family in a shower of letters, (received after the five day mountain climbing nightmare), which amounted to a family re-union on paper. My regards to any and all mutual friends. Heard you got a raise. Congrachoolashuns!

Cheers,

Don

*For if I do this thing willingly I have a reward.—
Corinthians.*

10 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Jim,

I suppose this will be a surprise to you unless you have heard from the folks, lately, but here I am right in your own backyard.

I'll be here for approximately a month taking a refresher course after which I climb aboard one of your sturdy vessels and proceed to that precious jewel set in a silver sea to join the British Imperial Army. You no doubt have read something in the papers about the deal. Canada has too many junior officers kicking around. The British Army can use them. So off we go on a voluntary basis to tackle the wily hun in company with the veterans of Dunkirk.

I'm not exactly overwhelmed with the idea of serving with the British, but as far as I can see it was my only chance of getting overseas before I am too old and decrepit to fight.

How about a week-end? I think I can get away either this week-end or next. Any chance of our meeting half-way as we did once before? Drop me a line and any arrangement you suggest I can confirm by wire.

Had a good three days at home and another riotous day and night in Montreal with Mother, Marion and Chickie Hooker. J. K. Brown and I took the kids out to a night club and tied a pretty fair one on.

I may or may not get a leave before pulling out of here, depending upon circumstances with which you are more familiar than I. So I think a week-end is our best bet.

Hope to see you soon,
Don

10 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Mother;

I am assuming you are still in Montreal. If not, Marion will undoubtedly open this letter and send it on to you. Well, we got down to business here today and the course lasts approximately a month. After that I may or may not get leave, depending on obvious factors.

Wrote Jim tonight and hope to get together with him this week-end or next. Can't make this into a letter because I am too tired to think very alertly tonight. However the course doesn't appear to be quite as tough as I expected. As a matter of fact it's just designed to keep us busy and teach us something until we are ready to move. J. K. and I certainly enjoyed our brief if strenuous stopover in Montreal. Hope I may be able to see the sweater girls again before I go. How's my chic little chicken Chickie? Don't go throwing around any fulminate of mercury.

That's all this time.
Don

A-34 S.O.T.C.
Sussex, N. B.
April 12th, 1944

[to Miss Maurine Stuart]

Dear Maurine,

There, in the right top corner, is my address. And there is nothing in K.R. (Can.) or the Manual of Military Law which says you must wait until a soldier is overseas before you write him.

Come girl, it's your duty. My morale must be kept up you know. The government is continuously saying so in advertisements. Besides Emily Post specifically states on page 264, that a well bred young lady must write a "thank you" note to a young man when he presents her with a book—(or a diamond necklace or a pair of imitation silk stockings).

Don't mind what you say in your letter. It can be solemn, silly or sentimental; witty or wise; benevolent or banal; friendly or philosophical; naughty or nice; passionate or prim. This of course isn't exactly a letter. It's just a blackmail trick to get you to write. I'll reply.

Cheers,

Don

14 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

[Miss Bert Argue]

My dear little nurse:

I have noticed, with some chagrin, that your previous letters to me have lacked that quality of tender affection which warms the frosty cockles of a soldier's heart.

Hoping to raise the romantic level of your flirtations by mail I am hereby enclosing a clipping from a magazine called "Zephyr" or "Heifer" or something for your earnest consideration.

Couldn't you make your letters a bit zippier? This book, which is so hysterically advertised, will enable you to write—and I quote—"wonderful letters full of tender affection." I would be highly delighted to get a "wonderful" letter "full of tender affection."

"You don't have to be a great writer" says the advertisement, "to make your letters leap with excitement." Come on Bert. Get that wonderful book and see if you can write me a letter that will leap around so much with excitement that I won't be able to open it without a butterfly net.

How is my little dove (tender affection) enjoying the army life, trotting through the wards with a thermometer in one hand and a bedpan in the other, darting wistful glances of benevolent solicitude at the poor bedridden soldiers? Bet you're having the time of your life.

Expect to be here for several weeks. Will drop you a line from overseas.

This book, Bert, gives you quotations from "lovers whose impassioned words scorched pen and paper." So how about getting some sturdy fireproof paper, sit down near the extinguisher in the nearest ward, and dash off a sizzling masterpiece. Don't neglect to make it "leap with excitement" either.

Cheers,

Don

17 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Jim,

A re-union at Marshland's Inn would suit me fine. If Doug Simpson could come along, I would enjoy seeing him again. At any rate tell him to pop over to Sussex for a day if he strikes an unexpected leave during the next few weeks.

It is highly doubtful if I can get away Friday. So unless you hear from me to the contrary, will arrive in Sackville at 5.05 p.m. Saturday. Will have to leave Sackville at noon Sunday to make connections, unless I stay until midnight and spend the night on the train.

Will wire if I can make a better deal or if a hitch occurs.

Regards,

Don

(?) April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

[To Miss Chickie Hooker]

Dear Chick,

Or should I say my "dear little chicken." Well, the date's off because of a previous engagement with the Imperial Army.

Too bad, Chickie, I should have enjoyed waltzing you around El Morroco in a return engagement. But I'll keep the date after the war, if I'm not too old and gray and full of sleep by then. Why, my hair is beginning to recede at the forehead, and my knees creak and groan ominously when on route marches. However I'm sure if that dainty old fleshpot J. K. Brown, whose cascade of chins Marion chucked, can make it, I guess I should be able to in another couple of years.

In the meantime, don't put any fulminate of mercury in your coffee, amatol in your ale or baratol in your beer.

We had a lot of fun.

G'bye,

Don

17 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Mother,

Have no particular news to report but am still hoping to get a bit of a leave before I shove off. Received your letter and fruit cake re-addressed from Prince George and the cake was most delicious. Send me another one sometime after I'm in England.

Have been in touch with Jim and we have arranged to get together at our former meeting-spot—Marshland's Inn, Sackville, N. B.—next week-end, if no hitch occurs.

Hope you enjoyed the remainder of your stay in Montreal and managed to make that trip up Mount Royal. J. K. certainly enjoyed his stop-over and thinks we are a wonderful family to have so much fun together. His father died a couple of days after he arrived here and of course he was unable to attend the funeral.

Received another batch of *New Yorkers*, Dad, and would be vastly appreciative if you would continue to send me them from time to time after I cross the pond. When you stop hearing from me for an interval of more than a week or so you can draw your own conclusions and wish me bon voyage.

Meantime, all goes well.

Love,

Don

(?) April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Mother:

Just a note to let you know I have not forgotten you as the weeks roll by. At the moment I am in the writing room of the YMCA while a dance proceeds in the hall. Presently I shall have a couple of dances and call it a night.

To-morrow I make a little side trip to Saint John (at the army's expense) to get a new pair of army glasses. Then Saturday I'm off to Sackville to meet Jim. Every other night here we get an inoculation of some sort. I'll have enough pin-pricks for a tattoo before I board the ship.

Don't forget Joe's address, and remind Dad about my watch. Time is getting short. In fact we never know when we are liable to go. Cannot get a

leave of more than a couple of days so will probably be able to manage only a trip to Halifax.

So long for now.

Love,

Don

25th April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Maurine,

It was very nice hearing from you so soon. I am sorry I contributed to your getting into the bad books of the United Service Centre officials. If it is any consolation, I assure you I would go AWOL or lie to the Colonel to keep a date with you.

Please forgive me the typewriter. I am simply more at ease with it, the agony is less and the result is much more legible. Besides your clear and graceful script makes me ashamed to commit my ghastly and laborious scrawl to paper. If your Mother gets pleasure from Saroyan's tender nonsense, so much the better. Hope your spring fever doesn't make you too miserable. The nearest I come to that affliction is a slight balminess every April which makes me turn around and stare at pretty girls on the street and wonder vaguely when cupid's arrow will penetrate my bony ribs.

You'd better tell your brother Bob to do a little more walking. Who knows—the army in its wisdom might send him to Terrace for mountain climbing. No mountains here, Dieu merci.

Describe Sussex? Why there's really not enough of it to describe. Just a typical little sleepy N. B. village. Quaint and charming perhaps, in a dowdy sort of a way, like Maritimers, but lacking the freshness, zest and eager youth of Pacific Coast towns like Courtenay and Prince George. Maybe I'm prejudiced. I don't particularly like the Maritimes, God forgive me. Just spent a day in Saint John, and it is, as Bruce Hutchison describes it in *The Unknown Country* . . . "the ugliest town in the Dominion." Don't, dear girl, mention what I said to a bluenose. He would follow me to the far corners of the earth, and smite me into the dust for my awful blasphemy.

Spent last week-end with my brother, Jim, whom I met at Sackville, N. B., seat of Mount Allison University, and peopled by dear old ladies of both sexes, and fresh faced young coeds. The young men are all off to the wars. Jim and I enjoyed the sight of so much young loveliness, and then, staid bachelors as we are, repaired to our diggings and talked far into the night. It

was almost a year since I saw him last—in the same town, at the same inn (Marshland's, famous for its good food and hospitality). We just put the clock forward another year and resumed our talk where we left off last time. Hope to see him again before I sail. Jim and I will probably step out with Doug. Simpson and Ferne (if she is there). Doug is at HMCS King's, Halifax.

Write me again, if it is not a nuisance for you. Life is too short to do too many things one doesn't like doing. Tell me about your music. I like hearing of things my army life denies me. Read Oscar Levant's a *Smattering of Ignorance* recently, and it is a most entertaining collection of odds and ends, about music and people.

I generally use lack of time as an excuse for never writing letters. But it's just sheer laziness or failure to get in the mood. As G.B.S. once remarked to a friend who scoffed at his interminable correspondence with Ellen Terry: "Where but on paper, has mankind achieved dignity, truth, or beauty?"

Sincerely,
Don

27 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Jim,

Prospects of another week-end appear pretty dim at the moment. We are not allowed to leave Sussex this week-end and something may be brewing. However that is the way it has been all along with the other flights, and things may drag out for another couple of weeks or so.

If I can make it the following week-end I will let you know, probably at the last minute. Failing that, I may see you in Halifax in the near future.

Hope to see you again.

Cheers,
Don



D. A. D.
(Sussex, N. B., April, 1944)

28 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Folks:

This may be the last letter you get from me from this side but of course I can't be sure. Had a good visit with Jim at Sackville last week-end, but I doubt if I will be able to see him again as I planned.

Thanks for your letter Mother enclosing Joe's address. It is doubtful if we will get a leave as soon as we land, but will certainly look Joe up at the first opportunity.

Received the watch O.K. Dad, see if you can manage to send the odd *New Yorker* overseas to me, unless I find I can get it over there, in which case I will let you know. It is my most gratifying literary diet. If J. K. Brown doesn't get through his medical I'll ask him to give you a call on his way through. You might ask him to dinner if he stays over at all. However I hope he gets through. George McRae, incidentally, decided he would marry the Vancouver girl. He left for Winnipeg on a special leave the same day she left Vancouver. I trust they managed to meet.

Incidentally I had my blasted picture taken for you. It's pretty ghastly but you'll get a print when it's developed. Keep it in your drawer. Am sending one to Dorothy and Marion.

Love,

Don

"You must remember," she said "always to give of anything you have. You must give foolishly even. You must be extravagant. You must give to all who come into your life."—The Human Comedy.

28 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Marion:

Thanks for your letter. It gave me the impression I hadn't written you since arriving here. I'm damn sure I did, didn't I? Naturally I can't tell you when I'm leaving, but it won't be long now. Incidentally I had my picture taken and a copy will be sent you when it is developed. I don't see why I shouldn't be represented in your rogue's gallery. I am wearing a ghastly, nauseating grin but even so I don't think the picture looks quite as bad as the real thing.

Oh yes, George McRae. Well, he decided on the Vancouver girl, wangled a special leave and is now in the process of consummating the marriage en route from Winnipeg to here. I had to borrow \$50.00 from Jim to see him through his nuptials. Now J. K. and I will have to keep him from falling in love with some dapper British hussy. L'amour, toujours, l'amour, b'golly.

The leave is now out of the question unless something quite unexpected happens. Have a good holiday this summer at home. Percy could get the boat out for you if you wanted it. And don't waste your golden youth in the Picadilly club.

Goodbye for now,
Don

30 April, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

[to Lt. Frank Emma and Lt. Norm Anderson, Wpg. Light Infantry]

Dear Frank and Norm;

Frank, I have no way of knowing whether or not Norm has left the unit, but if he has, how would you like to pass this note along to him? Well, it's just a matter of when now and I think we will be away pretty soon. The course here was the usual chicken-dung.

J. K. Brown, you will be surprised to hear, slipped through his medical board with no questions asked. I don't think he will be much good to the British for a while though, because both his ankles are badly messed up. I'm glad he's going with us though. McIvor has been instructing in battle drill for the past week. He took a few extra days at home en route here while his wife delivered herself of a child.

J. K. and I had a grand evening in Montreal en route with my young sister and her friend. Our bill at the El Morroco was \$31.00 not counting tips so you can gather it was quite a do. Spent a week-end with Jim at Sackville, N. B., and said my farewells. He is trying to wangle an overseas appointment himself but has not had much luck so far.

It certainly looks as though we are going to get there in time to take part in what is coming. Better that anyway than Gilbert and Sullivan at Prince George. I rather think I'll get along alright with the British if I can get by physically.

Well, I guess this marks the end of an era, Frank. We did have a lot of fun though. Hope you and Norm get a decent break, and will expect a note from both of you after I give you my overseas address.

Cheers,

Don

*Yet is not death the great adventure still,
And is it all loss to set ship clean anew
When heart is young and life an eagle poised?*
James Elroy Flecker

1 May, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Roy:

Just a word to thank you for your letter and bid you adieu before I take off for the great adventure.

Don't forget, I'll be relying on you to keep me in touch with the news behind the news on the home front.

Incidentally, it's getting pretty close to Bette's "D" day, isn't it? Wouldn't be at all impossible for the United Nations to open the second front the same day Bette does likewise. Aren't I awful, Bette?

Roy, you'll be getting an unsolicited photo of yours truly. Mother insisted on my getting a picture for her and having an extra copy, I sent it on to you. Haven't seen the damn thing myself yet—nor will I see it.

I'll try not to get married to a British hussy during my stay, but from the look of things, I don't think there'll be much time for anything but fighting.

Well, pretty busy at the moment. Will write you again from Blighty.

Cheers,

Don

2nd May, 1944, Sussex, N. B.

Dear Dad;

Just a brief note to clean up one or two financial odds and ends.

I made a rather complicated three way loan to a friend who got married. Jim lent me \$50.00 cash to lend him. He transferred a \$50.00 Victory Bond deliverable in a couple of months to me. It will come to you. In case Jim

needs the money I would like you to send him one of my \$50.00 bonds right away. That will straighten things out. Another \$150.00 in bonds purchased in the last loan by me, will arrive in due course. Please apply my income tax refund when and if it arrives, to my Investors Syndicate account. You might keep the account up to date for me and advise what I owe.

Cheerful note; my will, at the Records office in Ottawa, is in favor of Mother with yourself as executor. Tell Mother J. K. Brown got through his medical although both of us were underweight, and I almost got nicked on eyesight,

Cheers,
Don

12 May, 1944, Great Britain

[Cable]

Mrs. R. C. Duncan
75 Canora St., Winnipeg, Man.

Affectionate greetings from Trafalgar Square all's well love.

Don Duncan

CDN 450
Lieut. D. A. Duncan
4th Bn. Welch Regiment
A.P.O.
England
14 May, 1944

Dear Folks,

Well, here I am, right on Hitler's doorstep, watching the bombers passing overhead en route to their many targets in Europe.

I have been in England for only a few days, and so much has happened so fast, I have not been able to gather my wits sufficiently to write. However I trust you got my cable.

The crossing was very crowded but the seas were kind to us, and I could hardly wait to get into the dining room. Two meals a day were not enough (because of the terrific problem of feeding several thousand troops,

including two hundred nursing sisters). We landed at Liverpool and proceeded to London that night. We had one glorious afternoon and evening in London and the next day were on our way to join our respective units.

As you gather from my address, I am in a Welsh regiment, but they speak English, thank God, and have given us an excellent reception. Three of us, Harry Crowe, J. K. Brown and I managed to stick together which makes it much pleasanter. All told there are now eight Canadians in this unit, plus two Norwegian officers. No danger of being lonesome.

The night we arrived, the Welshmen escorted us to the local pub, where they proceeded to ply us unmercifully with 'alf pints of bitters. It was good fun. These lads are hard as nails and all ready for action. Your guess is as good as mine.

Tomorrow, after two days with our new unit, we go to another town for a divisional battle course. After that, I hope and pray, we get a week or two leave, when I anticipate visiting Joe for a day or two. The weather has been incredibly perfect so far, and England is as lush a garden as it was in 1937, when I last was here. Incidentally, I am stationed in an area through which I bicycled many years ago, and we are very comfortable. This, of course, won't last forever.

London no longer belongs to the English, but has been taken over lock, stock, and barrel by the Americans. Four baseball games were going on simultaneously in Hyde Park. The English are pretty tolerant blokes but they are most certainly not head over heels in love with the Yanks who have the money, the gals and the best hotels. However they'll need the Yanks when the show starts. Jack and I walked about London staring with unbelieving eyes at buildings which are no longer there. Prudently, we scurried home on the tube before the blackout became really black. And the nazis did not spoil our evening by dropping any eggs.

The platoon officer I am more or less understudying, a friendly little Welshman who served two years in the ranks, served in the Commandos for a year until he was wounded and spent some time in hospital. My company commander served with the Eighth Army in North Africa. Makes us feel rather unimportant. And there is no doubt about it—we are as green as hell. However we'll do the best we can, and I think we'll fit in alright.

J. K. is sitting in the same room writing his girl friend and wondering if his poor feet will stand up to the battle drill course. I am not expecting to have any holiday on it either. But after that—if things don't happen too fast—a glorious leave in England at its best season.

Well, I have to catch up on a little sleep, although I've probably drunk so much tea today I won't be able to sleep. Tomorrow morning a batman will waken me at seven with a cup of tea in his hand. Can you believe it? I can't.

I'll write again soon,

Love,

Don

Hope you got the picture.

15 May, 1944, England

Dear Jim,

At the moment, I am living the life of Reilly. J. K. Brown, Harry Crowe and I have just come in for a pint of bitters after discussing Canadian economy and politics for an hour on the lawn of a former country estate. This is England at its best—which is pretty damn good.

J. K., Harry and I managed to stick together and have just arrived here from our unit for a two week battle course. After that, if things don't happen too quickly, we will get a week or two leave. The British administration of our group was excellent. We received a very fine reception in London and the next day proceeded to our units—ours the 4th Bn., Welch Regiment. The Welsh, as you know, would rather fight than eat.

After two days at the unit, we came here—southern England will do. The room we are occupying was no doubt the “blue” room in the halcyon days of peace, occupied by Lady Cholmondeley. This morning, as every morning, I was awakened by a batman bearing a “cup of 'ot tea sir.” This is England alright. It's going to be a grim show, but I wouldn't have missed it for all the gold on Wall Street.

J. K. and I spent one glorious pub-crawling evening in London, which is owned, operated and inhabited by the Americans—to the ill-concealed discomfiture of the British. I took J. K. to my former haunt—Hyde Park, where four American baseball games were in progress. These, I am sorry to report, drew larger audiences than the Hyde Park orators. While J. K. and I were bug-eyed with bitters and astonishment at the spate of people from all corners of the world, Gerry Kramer (former R.W.R.) explored in better Baedeker fashion, and was awarded with a sight of the Queen and Winnie C. at their respective Hq.—Buck. Palace and 10 Downing.

In three days, circumstances have enabled us to see a good deal of the countryside. The same fairy book beauty everywhere. We are billeted at our

unit in a typical provincial town full of pubs and characters. Extremely refreshing after Canadian barrack rooms. Have been to Canterbury in my travels and can assure you the Cathedral is still there, stretching its fingers to the sky in thankfulness that it still stands. J. K., after one look at the area is convinced that Providence saved it. You don't have to look very far to find an empty lot in London either.

The Welshmen, many of whom have done a little soldiering, gave us a grand reception—that is, they hustled us off to the favorite pub and plied us unmercifully. As you predicted, the class system has long since broken down, and plenty of plain blokes are among the officers. The O.C. appears a bit stiff, and keeps himself apart, but apparently is a crackerjack of a soldier. My company commander is a veteran of the Eighth in North Africa. Monty, of course, is our big boss. I feel ignorant as hell about fighting with these lads, but they aren't a bit cocky and am sure will give us the benefit of the doubt on all occasions. Seems a shame to inflict J. K. and I—the skinniest officers in the Can. Army—on these sunburned blighters, but I guess we'll stumble along alright. Am hoping to see “Arsenic and Old Lace” and “Blithe Spirit” in London pretty soon, but God knows how soon I'll be on my second trip to the continent.

Well, J. L. D., it was grand seeing you aboard even though I was half asleep and incoherent. The trip, as you can guess, was pretty crowded but we stayed afloat, which is the main thing.

Cheers,

Don

18 May, 1944, 53 Div. Battle School, England

Dear Folks,

First, a word about my address. There has been a ghastly ball-up in connection with the postal arrangements made for Canadians serving with the British Army. At present we don't know where the hell we are at, and we are now forbidden to use our unit address. Until the situation is clarified, please write me c/o Uncle Joe and I'll ask him to forward the letters. Do *not* mention my number or the name of my unit—simply Lt. D. A. Duncan, c/o J. R. Livingstone, etc. The address for parcels still stands except you must omit the name of my unit. We had the divisional G1 visiting us at the battle school tonite, and J. K. and I sailed into him about the unsatisfactory postal arrangements. Something will be done. Invasion preparations, of course, have much to do with the super security.

Well, I am still at the battle school, living in a lovely country mansion on a beautiful south England estate. In a week's time I will be returning to my unit, and expect a week or two leave, if Montgomery doesn't need me before then. Incidentally, Montgomery addressed my unit's officers shortly before we Canadians arrived and he is reported to have said: "I'll see you fellows again over there. I may not know all of you, but by God, you'll know me!" Quite a character they say.

Mother, you would really enjoy a view of this estate. The house has few luxuries left, of course, having been occupied by the Army for some time. But there are still some Currier and Ives prints on the drawing-room wall.

The plumbing is full of surprises. One toilet is beautifully decorated with blue flowers. The chain looks like a concealed booby-trap and when you pull it all hell breaks loose, or else nothing happens. The showers are in the stables and you have to hold a chain down with one hand (to keep the water running) and lather up with the other.

We have tea at 4:30, then usually a lecture at 6:00, supper at 7:00 and coffee in the ante-room. Verry English. The food is much better than I expected, and there is lots of it. For the last three evenings, J. K., Harry Crowe and I have strolled down English lanes, generally ending up at a pub for a glass of bitters, or a nut brown ale. Very pleasant. You can get virtually anything you want to drink anywhere in England, which is surprising when you think of the desperate queues in Canada for the monthly "26."

I wrote Jim, but forgot to enclose the Privilege Parcel Section address. Since he said he would send me some cigarettes, would you mind sending it to him. They cost about 60 cents for 20 here, which is pretty steep, but I laid in a fair supply on the ship at a reasonable price. Have not received any mail so far and with things mixed up the way they are, I don't expect to see any for a few weeks. Joe's address will get me alright. Please pass on my current postal instructions to anyone who might want to write. And so to bed, until a batman charges in with a canvas basin full of hot water with which I wash, shave and clean my teeth. Then bacon and eggs (believe it or not).

Cheers,

Don

21 May, 1944
c/o J. R. Livingstone
Ramleh, South Wootton

King's Lynn, England

Dear Roy and Bette:

Postal arrangements are so garbled and unsatisfactory for us Canadians attached to the British Army that I am using my Uncle's address until the situation is clarified. Good arrangements were made by C.M.H.Q. but as soon as we were posted to our units, a divisional order arbitrarily washed up all previous instructions.

There are eight Canadians posted to our unit and some of us will go into action with the unit when the show opens—perhaps before you read this letter. Three of us,—Harry Crowe, J. K. Brown and I managed to stick together, which makes it much pleasanter (more pleasant). We are with a Welsh regiment stationed in South England and at present are attending a two week's battle school. The school is situated on a country estate of indescribable loveliness and we are billeted in Lady Cholmondoley's "blue" room—as near as I can guess. The main objection to the house—and to England generally—is that it is never warm. Four of us just lit a fire in the grate so we could get our hands warm enough to write. However, the weather has been grand which helps a lot.

Yesterday afternoon J. K. and I spent pub-crawling in the English countryside which is at its best in May. This afternoon (Sunday) we propose to do more or less likewise. There is no liquor ration in England.

Our unit is billeted in a charming little village and ready for action when the hour strikes. Many of the officers and other ranks are veterans of Dunkerque, North Africa, etc. The chap I am working with served in the commandos for a year and was wounded at St. Nazaire. Naturally we are pretty green but they have been very decent to us. The day we arrived our company officers hurried us off to the local pub and plied us with bitters and nut brown ale.

Every day the bombers and fighters roar overhead on their deadly mission and we keep thinking we'll be following them soon.

Hope to have a leave when this course ends and will visit my Uncle, and if I can find him, the old boiler-maker.

Firecracker day pretty soon eh?—the big event at "846." Let me know how Bette fares and how many cigarettes you smoke. (A Nazi propagandist is giving us the business over the radio, damn him.) So far, we haven't lacked for plenty of good food and the English even throw in an extra meal at 4:30 (tea, of course). Am very glad I have J. K. and Crowe with me.

The crossing, by the way, was pleasant but crowded as hell. We weren't escorted which indicates our command of the Atlantic. Harry Crowe, unfortunately, spent the entire period in his bunk, rising only to eat and shave. I, of course, am a sailor from way back and didn't bat an eye. Well, my space is gone so it's your turn.

Cheers,

Don

21st May, 1944, England

Dear Maurine,

Left my typewriter back at my unit, so please do your best to solve these hieroglyphics. Postal arrangements for we Canucks attached to the British Army have not been very satisfactory so I am using my Uncle's address for the time being. If you answered my last note from Sussex, N. B., I am not likely to receive it for weeks, the way things are messed up.

I have been posted to a Welsh unit and am attending the Divisional Battle school at the moment. We are living on a former country estate in one of the loveliest parts of England, and whenever we find time, J. K. (fellow Wpg. Officer) and I take long walks through the countryside, refreshing ourselves with a glass of "bitters" at wayside inns.

The house is Victorian (very ugly therefore), spacious, and cold. I can visualize Lord and Lady Blatherstone retiring for the night in the Blue Room (where ten of us are billeted) with instructions for Jeeves to call them at eleven. I hope the Lord and Lady accepted the whimsical plumbing with more composure than I have. Water to wash and shave is served up by batmen in the morning in canvas buckets. The lavatories (if I may be so vulgar) are magnificent, colorful, and imposing; but when you pull the good old chain, anything is liable to happen, and usually does.

Soldiers are always hungry, so I find the English institution of 4.30 tea very acceptable. Someone just lit a fire in the grate, so I hope my hands will warm up enough to make my writing more legible.

London (one day there so far) is owned and occupied by the Americans. With their fists-full of money, and tendency toward noisiness, many of them have gotten thoroughly into the hair of the English. All the same the English are very glad to have them here for the big job at hand. The Englishmen particularly resent the way the English girls go for the Americans' classy uniforms, and full pocket books. People don't know what to make of us

Canadians wearing Welsh insignia, and talking with mid-west Canadian accents. If they look closer however, they'll still see the little "Canada" flashes of which, of course, we are very proud.

Hope to have a leave soon, when I plan on taking in a few plays and concerts in London. However time is short, and soon the grim business will be started on the other side of the channel. Keep your fingers crossed for me—for all of us—as there will be a lot of nasty stuff flying about. I'll write again if events allow but they may not. Please write if you are not rushed about too strenuously and give my morale a nice boost.

Cheers,

Don

21 May, 1944, England

Dear Frank and Norm:

J. K. Brown, Harry Crowe and I managed to stick together and have been posted to a Welsh regiment, along with several other Canadians. The unit is all set for the big show and some of us will undoubtedly go with it while others will be 1st reinforcements. I have no doubt but what reinforcements—and plenty of them—will be needed in short order, so J. K. and I are girding our puny loins for the inevitable tangle, with English bitters, double Scotches and nut brown ale. McIvor and Pearson are together in another regiment in our brigade. Bretz somewhere else.

At the moment most of the Canadians in our division are attending the Div. Battle School. It is the same academic jargon handed out at Vernon and Sussex, except we have had a few very profitable lectures from chaps who have actually seen action. You should have heard what one of these lads—a real tough ranker, just commissioned—had to say about the "Lady Godiva walk and various animal crawls" they teach at the battle schools. I don't think our course is as tough as the Vernon one, perhaps because there are no qualifications involved. Anyway J. K. (who sends his kindest regards) is still on his feet, bad ankles and all.

At the moment we are gazing out the large French windows of a vast Victorian mansion over the beautiful, lush, green country estate which is the battle school. Far nicer flopping on your belly on a rich grass carpet than in two feet of Vernon snow. No matter what we are doing we usually manage to get back to our billet in time for 4:30 tea, followed by a lecture at 6:00, a couple of pints of England's best or a double Scotch, then supper at 7:30.

Our unit is stationed in a pretty English village full of quaint pubs and tea gardens. Two companies' officers live together in a requisitioned house. J. K. and I are both in Support, but if we go as reinforcements will probably end up with rifle platoons. The Welshmen (actually a mixture of Welsh, Scots and English—plus us and two Norwegian officers) gave us a very cordial reception, and plied us with ale the first night. You will be amazed to learn that the first night there a gang of officers invaded the sgts.' mess and had quite a time. The British are no stuffier than we are. However we were only there two days before getting posted to the battle school.

Pre-invasion London is really something to see; more uniforms of all nations are to be seen in one block than you would find at a costume ball. J. K. didn't feel any too well most of the way across, and Harry Crowe never left his bunk, except to go to meals and to the toilet (which he combined in one trip). I felt swell all the way over, thanks to my small boat experience. Actually it was a pretty quiet crossing.

Well, I think I'll go to town (Sunday) and have a look at the baseball game between the local Americans and Canadians. It's hard to believe we're so close to the big show but a glance at the skies tells a story. Passed through Canterbury during our travels and got some idea of what bombing can do. London, of course, has its own story written across the face of the city in the buildings that aren't there.

Postal arrangements for us have been so garbled and obscured that no one knows precisely what address he is authorized to use, so I am having my mail relayed from my uncle. So write, you damned west coast wassailers.

Cheers,

Don

24 May, 1944, England

Dear Marion,

About time I let you know I am safe and sound in England. Presume Mother may have sent on to you my earlier letter giving a report on my trip, arrival and posting to a British unit. Am just completing a two weeks' course at our divisional Battle School, and hope to have a week or two of leave in a few days to look about England if the invasion doesn't require my dubious services beforehand. J. K. and I are still together, and Harry Crowe provides the political and academic background to our discussions, as we roam the English countryside in the mellow May evenings.

We just finished a stroll to “Dunk’s Corner”—of all places—and tonight go out on a pill-box clearing exercise. I don’t think the English instructors know quite what to make of us blinkin’ colonials, particularly the French Canadians, who are a bit on the uncivilized side.

As I told Mother and Jim, we are stationed for this course on a beautiful country estate in the loveliest part of England and are rather enjoying it. If the army part of it could be left out, it would be really swell. We are all sufficiently Anglicized now that we are very annoyed if we don’t get in from our schemes in time for tea at 4.30. Supper is at 7.30 followed by a ghastly witches’ brew in the ante-room which goes under the name of coffee. By the way, Harry Crowe tells me you invariably opposed every suggestion of his on the University Students’ council? Were you such bitter opponents?

Have not yet met any Canadians I know from earlier days, but expect to get around a bit during my leave, despite the train curtailments. I am afraid you would despair of the night life in England, because everything closes up about 10.30 when darkness falls (double daylight saving), and not a light must show—not even a cigarette. You have to either undress in the dark or cover all the windows with blackout curtains. Last night J. K., Harry and I engaged four local yokels in a dart game in a nearby pub, while their wives looked merrily on, sipping bitters or cordials. The pub life is the most fascinating aspect of rural England.

Everyone is marking time until the big show begins and we are pretty sure of getting in on it, if not at the beginning, then soon afterwards.

J. K. and I have decided to stand on our hands in a slit trench, get a few toes blown off, and return to England to tell you how the invasion went. Our British lads might consider this somewhat eccentric but they probably think we’re crazy anyhow.

Am using Joe’s address until our postal arrangements are clarified a bit more, so drop me a line. Have not heard from Canada yet, but some lads have been here two months without mail. It’s a sore point with all of us. My kindest regards to Chickie. I wish she were here to set off this bangalore torpedo tonight. The damned things scare the tea and potatoes out of me. Joe has extended a warm invitation to J. K. and I to make his place our “home” in England, and we will no doubt have a good visit with him.

Well, it’s getting dark and I’m getting lazy and the paper’s running out—just as it’s always run out in English lavatories which are marvellously impractical. My regards to Alan.

Cheers,

Don

J. K. sends his best!

3 June, 1944, England

Dear Jim,

J. K. and I are in the midst of a two-week leave, subject to recall on short notice. As a matter of fact we are very lucky to get the leave at this stage in the game.

We're spending a few days with the Livingstones', enjoying their warm-hearted hospitality, heaping platters, and savoring the rich, tranquil peace of rural Norfolk, which is more like poetry or a tale from Chaucer than real life. Yesterday Joe took us to Sandringham Castle (The King's Sandy Hook), where we gaped in astonished incredulity at acres of lovely rhododendrons and a profusion of other blooms, suggestive of Shangri-la.

Joe is managing a provincial newspaper and doing very well. He leads a happy, gentle, and full life in a lovely corner of England. It seems to be in incredible contrast to events around the corner, but even the nearby town has felt the weight of the luftwaffe in the nightmare days of 1940. The more you see and talk with ordinary English folk, the more you realize what a magnificent impertinence was Churchill's speech in 1940 imposing "unconditional surrender" on the Germans—with no one to impose it but a few home guards like Joe, armed with one rifle and 10 rounds for five men.

J. K. and I took in Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit" at the Duchess a few days back. Excellent comedy with Coward at his sophisticated best. Other items on my itinerary, if Eisenhower gives me enough time and the pounds hold out: Lunt and Fontanne in "There Shall be No Night;" "Arsenic and Old Lace;" "A Soldier for Xmas;" and the following movies: Coward's "This Happy Breed;" "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and "A Canterbury Tale." How's that sound?

Tonight, nothing will do but that J. K. and I take blonde little Jean (18) and her blonder little friend Edith (18) to dinner and the town dance. Vim is busy match-making in the old fashioned English way, oblivious of the fact that J. K. and I are no longer boys. However we're enjoying everything.

Joe is very pleased to see me in a British unit, having been in the Royal Artillery last war. Our Welsh insignia with Canada flashes underneath certainly get some peculiar glances from the townsfolk.

The British are very calm about the invasion. You seldom hear it discussed, but I expect everyone is talking about where and when in Winnipeg. Beneath it all, however, particularly in the Army, there is an air of expectancy. I think it will be a relief when the fighting starts. Action is always more relaxing than waiting. This letter will be delayed by censorship. I hope not too long.

Cheers,

Don

3 June, 1944, England

Dear Folks,

I am writing this in J. R. Livingstone's parlor, with J. K. and Joan at my side looking over a map of England. Jack and I are on a two-weeks' leave which may or may not last two weeks. We are just keeping our fingers crossed.

Joe and Vim, as I expected, received us magnificently at their snug little bungalow in rural Norfolk, and have plied us with monumental meals, which we did not realize could still be manufactured in an English kitchen. This morning Jack and Jean bicycled to an old castle, while I enjoyed my first sleep-to-noon since arriving in England. This evening Vim "arranged" for Jack and I to take Jean and a blonde young friend of hers to a dance in town.

Sunday we will prowl about the countryside, and Monday return to London, where we are staying at the Maple Leaf Club for junior Canadian officers (very comfortable and reasonable). Jack loves to hear the Canadian accents of the Red Cross girls.

The Livingstones live in what appears to me to be a pastoral paradise. Yesterday we motored the few miles to Sandringham Castle (King's country estate) and saw the loveliness of acres of rhododendrons in bloom. (Hour later). Just finished lunch and the best cup of coffee Vim has managed yet. She is determined to make coffee which will make us say "Just like a Canadian brew."

Jack and I saw Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit" in London earlier in the week and plan on taking in a couple of other plays next week. Damned expensive, but we won't be needing our bank accounts when things get started. Hope to look up Irv Stevenson who is located near London, and one or two other friends.

Joe and Vim are the same happy couple, and they have taken (especially young Jean) quite a shine to J. K. Joe is very fortunate in having re-established himself so well, and as for me, I shouldn't ask for anything better than the provincial paper Joe is handling. Vim is a charming, impish little devil.

This letter will almost certainly be delayed. You will be able to tell how long by comparing the dates. Security is very strict at this time.

Affectionately,
Don

I have to believe there's something in the world that isn't evil—I have to believe there's something in the world that would rather die than accept injustice—something positive for good that can't be killed or I'll die inside.—Maxwell Anderson's "Key Largo" a play Don loved.

4th June, 1944, England

Dear Maurine,

In the last few days a good friend of mine and I have been steeping ourselves in the pastoral loveliness of rural Norfolk and filling ourselves gluttonously with my aunt's lavish cooking. We are making the most of a two weeks' leave—before the battle is joined.

The English countryside is like a tone poem of Sibelius, but here and there rises to the romantic symphonies of Tschaiakowsky. For one who has read considerable English literature, I often have that strange feeling of having "been here before"—but it is just a memory from Dickens or Hardy.

Can you read my ghastly scrawl? My uncle is a Canadian, who (like myself) fought in the British army in the last war. He married a charming English girl, and turned himself more or less into an Englishman. My Aunt, one of those old-fashioned match-makers—has already introduced me to a dainty young English blonde, and no doubt hopes to have the same fate visited on me as befell her husband. I'm afraid I shall disappoint her, through loyalty to Canada, and a congenital preference for brunettes.

J. K. (my chum) and I plan this week on taking in Sherwood's "There Shall be no Night" and two or three other first class plays—if the pounds last long enough. I would love to have been able to wine, dine, and theatre you in London. A symphony the next night, a trip through Kent the

following afternoon. Do you suppose the Service's Canteen could spare you for three days?

Have received no mail from Canada as yet, so if you perchance have written, the words are still shining like precious jewels in some musty officer-in-charge-of records' office. Pearls before swine. My mail, incidentally, will undoubtedly be delayed some time by censorship in view of impending events, so don't be surprised if the war is over by the time this reaches you. I wish it were over now, but there is a long and tortuous road to follow before we can breathe again the crisp, clean air of a world at peace.

It is good that some people, like yourself, are creating and scattering things of beauty while the rest of us concentrate on death and destruction. Don't give up your music Maurine. My God I'm getting stuffy. Never realized I could be so pompous. Must be my aunt's hot tea biscuits—six of which I just bolted like a starving dog.

My uncle's dog is looking at me as if to say "What frightful drivel are you up to now?"

Write me c/o my uncle, Maurine, when you are in the mood to waste time on a civilian-soldier. Did you read Marquand's *So Little Time*? I think I recommended it if I remember correctly. And so to a return visit to London and the pleasant business of enjoying a leave. How are your little darlings at Riverbend?

Sincerely,
Don

. . . to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised.—St. Luke.

D-Day, Tuesday, June 6, England

Dear Jim,

I haven't much news, but historical necessity suggests I write a letter to someone on D-Day. Harry Crowe, J. K. and I are back at the Maple Leaf Club in London (where I ran into Ted Pope) after a pleasant visit in Norfolk. This afternoon we are going to Coward's "This Happy Breed."

J. K., who invariably rises early, brought Harry and I the news while we lay in an early morning stupor. Crowe, academic and of ironic turn of mind, asked sleepily, "where did they land? Dover?—oh, you mean we invaded." Crowe then asked us what, in view of the imminence of battle, were our war

aims, and we replied as with one voice “to get that victory medal.” Whereupon yours truly indulged in a bit of grim humour by leaping out of bed, brandishing a make believe sword and declaring: “Alright men, follow . . . whrumph,” That put us in good mood for the rest of the morning.

The fresh-faced Red Cross girls, who toil here to make us comfortable, are gathered about the radio listening to an announcer report that “everything is going according to plan.” Outside, the life of London goes on as usual, and soon we will be down at Trafalgar square to see what new hopes, expectations, and fears, are registered on the faces of many nations in this amazing town.

June 9th

Didn't mail the letter, but it doesn't make much difference in view of censorship delays. Still on leave, which means I can't be slated for the beaches for a while yet.

Took an attractive English girl to dinner at “La Coquille” last night, and sat at the next table to a van-dyked epicure who looked like (and may have been) Christopher Morley. The English girl has invited me to her people's home in the country for the week-end which should prove interesting.

Unfortunately both my chums went broke and I am now trying to finance three of us for the last few days of our leave, which rather cramps my style.

Montgomery reports everything going “excellently” in France.

This afternoon, to Lunt and Fontanne (my last expensive fling I think).

Cheers,

Don

(D+4), 10th June, 1944, England

Dear Folks,

You will no doubt be relieved to know that I spent D-Day quietly at the Maple Leaf Club in London—still on leave. We thought our leaves would be cancelled, but I am still here, so I will probably not be in action for a few weeks. After reading the reports of the beach head fighting I am quite content to let someone else go first. Of course I have no idea to what part of Europe I will be sent.

J. K. and I had a grand visit with the Livingstones, and they treated us magnificently. I hope you will write them and tell them so. Jack even received a birthday greeting here in London, with a box of cigarettes.

The invasion has spoiled our leave to some extent, since we find it difficult to think of anything else, and really enjoy ourselves. However, we are trying to “make the most of what we yet may spend.” Last night saw Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontanne in Sherwood’s excellent play “There Shall be No Night.” Fontanne is indescribably fascinating, and a really great actress. Also saw the film “For Whom the Bell Tolls” which you must not fail to see when it comes to Winnipeg.

We cancelled a proposed trip to Edinburgh in view of developments, but are thoroughly enjoying the amazing life of war-time London. We have had a couple of invitations to English country homes, and I may accept one this week-end.

It is amazing to think of our forces storming the vast continent of Europe from this astonishing little island. With such a will to win, it is inevitable that the invasion will succeed. Don’t worry about me if you don’t get any news for considerable periods of time. Censorship imposes certain delays and then I shall soon be very busy—very busy indeed.

People have been very kind to us, and our British insignia with “Canada” underneath attract much curiosity amid the varied uniforms of many nations in London. The ordinary soldiers seem to like us, perhaps because we are easy to talk to and democratic in our ways.

Enough for now, and will write you again in another week.

Love,

Don

15 June, 1944, England

Dear Jim,

Congratulations on having been the first to get a letter through to me. That’s because the address was direct, and although I didn’t know it at the time, in violation of security.

My leave is over, and I am back in harness with a myriad of memories to show for my leave. My best regards to Don Best when you see him next. Will do my damndest to get the cigarettes from the Canadian Postal Authorities. Thanks a lot.

Overlook the disjointedness of this letter. I am tired and very busy, but better something than nothing before I gird up my loins for the fray.

J. K. and I have both been picked from among the Canadians to go with the unit. Harry Crowe goes to reinforcements which splits up the trio. By some clerical error I suppose, I got the best report of our group from the battle school, and was pronounced "Fit to command a platoon in action." Am now with a rifle company—a crack one at that. I hope to God I can keep up with them and don't have to be sent back for by a runner.

I feel much better about the whole thing now that I know where I stand, and what is expected of me. I only wish I had the physique to be able to take the physical end of things in my stride. In any case it will be quite a show.

Afraid I'm too tired to do much more tonight. There are a lot of things I would like to be able to say at this stage in the game, but I think most of them go without saying. I shall rely on you to write Mother as often as you can and keep her cheered up. I expect she visualizes me in every skirmish the papers report.

Cheers for now,
Don

16 June, 1944, England

Dear Folks:

At long last, I received some mail—a letter from you, Mother, forwarded from Sussex and acknowledging my cable, a note from Dad, and an air mail letter from Jim direct to my unit. No doubt subsequent letters will reach me in a block although I now may not get them for a few weeks.

I finished my leave alright and am now back with the unit. J. K. and I were chosen from among the Canadians to go with the unit when it goes. I understand we got good reports from the battle school. We lose Harry Crowe, however, who will be a reinforcement. So J. K. and yours truly (bespectacled and underweight) go forth when the time comes to tangle with the Hun. Here is the crowning pay-off. I shall be going into action on a *bicycle*! I am beginning to feel more and more like a character in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, although I don't expect the music to be exactly soothing. So don't be either surprised or alarmed when you get a letter from me datelined "a slit trench in Europe."

Actually, there's nothing much I can tell you. My leave is a pleasant memory and it's strictly business from now on. Jack and I met our former

O.C. Winnipeg Rifles in London last week (Col.—now Major—Miller). He was very glad to see us, and somewhat amazed at our British insignia. From him we heard a lot of news about our old colleagues. I suppose many Winnipeggers held their breath while the Canadians did their share of the dirty work on the beach head. I hope I am away before the casualty lists come out.

This letter may be delayed before it reaches you, and there may be an even longer delay before I get another one away. But for heaven's sake don't worry and assume I am taking part in every battle on the European front. (Just changed pens.) Please give my dearest love to Dorothy, and tell her I will write her at the earliest opportunity, and tell her about the battle of the bicycle. Have written Jim, but owe Marion another letter. Could you send her this note?

Enjoy Sandy Hook this summer and forget about Europe. Maybe I'll be home in time to put up the Xmas tree.

Love,

Don

Everyone suddenly burst out singing . . .

And the song was wordless; the singing will never be done.

Sassoon's "Everyone Sang"

20 June, 1944, England

Dear Folks:

Here's another brief letter just to show I am thinking of you, even though I have only had one letter from home since I left Canada—and one from Jim. However, the mail will catch up with me sooner or later.

At the moment I am lying on my belly in a tent in southern England, feeling very lazy and complacent after an excellent lunch. I have said goodbye to the sweet, smiling village where I was billeted, and await the day I set off on my European Odyssey. The only disturbing element at the moment is Hitler's secret weapon—the robot plane. They go spluttering over us every once in a while, and you hear occasional explosions, some near, some far, all day and night. They're unpleasant things, but no worse than ordinary bombs.

Last night the lads in my company put on a sing-song in the service canteen. And can these Welsh lads ever sing! You would be amazed at the number of really fine voices in my platoon alone. A quartet sang *When Day*

is Done and it was marvellous. This afternoon we'll be playing a little baseball—a game which is new to the British, but fast taking hold with Canadian encouragement.

The boys are beginning to warm up to me, and I don't think I will have any worries about getting along with them in the field. They are willing, cheerful, and generous—and tough as nails, many having worked in the coal mines of Wales. The other platoon Commanders are nice lads—one Welsh, the other Norwegian.

I feel rather ridiculous visualizing myself in action on a bicycle. I look more like a professor of English on his way to a suburban college with his brief-case. At other times I swell to heroic proportions at the thought, and feel like crying, with Cleopatra, "Give me my robes, put on my crown, I feel immortal longings in me."

All my love,
Don

. . . all of them dressed as soldiers and trained for war. But from their eyes, from their high spirits, and from their laughter and shouting and singing, you knew that this was not an army alone, but a nation and surely a great and good one. You knew that while they had been taught to stand in line and to behave on schedule with no personal rights beyond the needs of the unit, they had not become a machine and were still good human beings . . . you knew surely that while their noise came from deep inner fear, they were still utterly unafraid. You knew that they had accepted . . . the necessity to dismiss their fear, and if it so happened, to die.
—"The Human Comedy."

[Probably 20th] June, 1944, England

Dear Jim:

Have a little time to waste for another day or two, so am favoring you with another report from England.

For the past hour have been idling in my tent in southern England, chewing the fat with the other two platoon commanders in my company—both good fellows—one a Welshman, the other a Norwegian regular who escaped from his country in a fishing boat. We interrupted our talk a moment ago to try and get a look at one of Goering's robots which just passed overhead with a horrible racket, and crashed not far off. Several of

the damn things have passed over me, but I haven't actually seen one yet. Unpleasant things, but not likely to hamper seriously the war effort unless the Nazis have gone in for them on a really large scale.

This afternoon we played baseball and basketball—two games which the British lads play with more enthusiasm than skill. On the other hand, I wouldn't like to try and keep up with them at soccer. (Here comes another damned robot—on its way to London I presume). What with robots and the 2 I/C telling foul stories it's rather hard to concentrate.

Did I tell you that when I go into action it will be on a bicycle? I don't suppose that's a military secret of any great importance. At any rate I'm sure I won't throw a greater scare into the enemy on a bike than on foot, but it makes me feel pleasantly ridiculous, like a James Thurber creation.

According to the newspapers, there's a race on between Monty and Rommel-Rundstedt to build up their respective forces for the battle of Caen. Who knows but what I may be writing you next from Caen.

(During supper, which I just had, three robots came down not far away—shot down no doubt by Spits. The trouble is they *still* explode whether they are shot down or come down of their own accord. Yes, a bit nasty.)

Tonight I shall go to the Naafi (service canteen) to hear some Welsh songs. Those boys can really sing. Then I propose to take up a post in the open and try and get a view of a robot. Everyone seems to have seen one but me.

I'll close with the song we sang as our transport sailed into Liverpool 6 or 7 weeks ago.

Why don't you join up?
Why don't you join up?
Why don't you join old Ralston's army.
Two bucks a week; — all to eat.
Great big boots and blisters on your feet.
Why don't you join up, etc.

Cheers,

Don

21 June, 1944, England

Dear Roy; Bette; Peter; Boots and the new arrival that I know not of:—

I am out of touch with events in your household. Hope things went well and Bette is her usual gaily charming self. Roy, I was in touch with Stevie by letter but have not yet seen him. Planned to visit him during my leave but events wrote the visit off. Then thought I would be posted near him as a reinforcement to my unit, but am going into action with the unit, along with my good friend J. K. Brown. As a matter of fact both of us are rather proud of having been selected to stay with the unit.

At the moment I am under canvas awaiting the shape of things to come. Soon I shall be rushing into the fray on a bicycle. We call our tent the International Settlement. Gerry, a Welshman, speaks Welsh and English. I, a Canadian, speak French and German after a fashion. Klaus, the third platoon Commander, a Norwegian, speaks five languages. My Company Commander is English.

I have had little difficulty getting on with my boys and they have done everything to make me feel welcome. On the whole, the men in the ranks seem to like Canadians.

The Welsh lads in the regiment are very musical and love to exercise their fine voices. I have been amazed at the number of fine voices in my Company alone, revealed at concerts in the evening. These lads—tough as a Welsh coal miner should be—will go into action with a song in their hearts and grim purposefulness in their minds. They are O.K.

Have no idea how the Canadians fared in Normandy, but gather they took quite a bit of stuff. Let me know if any of my acquaintances caught it, will you Roy?

The Americans are certainly doing a grand job at Cherbourg. Hope we do as well when our big push gets under way. Germany's fate is now as inevitable as Spring, although it will be an expensive business in lives.

I'll be looking for a letter from you when my mail catches up to me. My uncle's address gets around postal security difficulties, and should prove O.K. Give my regards to Mrs. Mulvihill if she's about, to Alice, Eleanor, Elizabeth, etc., Bert if you see her, (tell her to come over and spend Xmas leave with me in Paris). I'll write you again in a slit trench, which shouldn't require very much telling. Hope the Gov't. will allow you enough to feed another mouth, and take one down the hatch to my success on a bicycle.

My regards to Phyllis.

Cheers,

Don

If it's sad, nobly or foolishly, the man himself will make it so. If it's richly sad and full of beauty, it's the man himself so . . . and each man is the world.—“The Human Comedy.”

24 June, 1944, England

Hello old girl! [Dorothy]

Please don't expect much of a letter, because I'm writing this on a cardboard box, by the dim light of an old-fashioned coal oil lamp. Besides, my buddies are about ready for bed.

Not having heard from Canada for quite some time, I feel as if my letters are like robot planes which never come back, but I'm hoping a good packet of mail will catch up to me one of these days.

Just returned from a film at the canteen “So Proudly We Hail.” Shells and bombs were bursting at an awful rate on the screen while robot bombs were exploding not far away from my camp area, so I was not exactly sure at times of what was going on. Don't be alarmed though. There's a slit trench right beside my tent, and I'll be in it if I see one heading in my direction.

Visited a Polish airfield the other day, and watched their fighters come in from Normandy. Marvellous to watch. These Poles have been hammering the Nazis for four years. The lad I talked to graduated from his air training in Poland as one of 150. He and nineteen others are left. I guess it's a great life while it lasts.

Saw a Tempest shoot down a Robot plane yesterday; it was quite a thrill. The Robot killed three sheep when it exploded (not a serious blow to the Allied war effort), and the blast set my socks rocking on the clothes line. I hope the Germans run out of them soon; they are slightly unpleasant because you never know exactly when and where they are going to come down. “Flying mess tins,” my men call them.

I have a hard-fighting, hard-living, kind-hearted platoon of Welshmen whom I will lead into battle, and I think we will give a pretty good account of ourselves when our “D” day arrives.

Have just been censoring some of their letters, and find one lad has got himself inextricably involved with two women—one of whom he apparently intends to marry. You'd never believe such little toughies could write such sentimental letters. It's kind of sad in a way. Each one says in effect, “Don't

worry about me. I'll be alright." They seem to crave love and affection more when they are in the field than when at home.

J. K. Brown and I are still together, and I hope we come home together if that is not asking too much.

Anyway, the great adventure will soon be underway, when I shall leave my gentler nature in England, adopt as fierce an expression as I can muster with army spectacles, and pit my sinewy Welshmen against the Hun. Fantastic, isn't it? Anyway I don't think the job is going to take very long. Killing sheep, women, and children with robot planes won't postpone the inevitable hour for Mr. Schickelgruber and his unpalatable friends. Retribution is closing in on him from many directions.

I am quite happy so far in the British Army. I have made several good friends among the officers, and—more important—I am gaining the confidence of the men.

Well, old dear, pass on my greetings to the young 'uns and tell them I'll bring them back something nice from Europe, when the lights go on again all over the world.

Cheers,

Don

P.S. My very best to D. S.

*Yes, but if I die I know that men will never give in;
Then I'll know there's something in the race of men,
Because even I had it, that hates injustice more than it
Wants to live—because even I had it—and I'm no hero.
And that means the Hitlers and the Mussolinis always lose
In the end—force loses in the long run and spirit wins . . .
I keep my faith. In myself, and what men are. And in what we may be.*

Lines Don loved from Anderson's "Key Largo."

c/o J. R. Livingstone
24 June, 1944, England

Dear Maurine,

Please overlook the poor paper and scrawl. I am lying on my belly in a tent, balancing my paper on a cardboard box. An hour ago I was out in the English countryside on a bicycle, drifting through pleasant, smiling little English villages, under a bright blue sky and a warm sun. With me was

Klaus, a handsome Norwegian officer, who escaped from his country in a fishing boat after fighting the Nazis on his home soil. He is well educated, friendly, and a fine soldier. We call our tent the International Settlement and among the three of us we can manage about ten different languages. Klaus and I have been brushing up on our French and German in preparation for the day they will be needed.

Most of my boys are Welsh, and next to fighting, their dearest love is singing. At a concert the other night, two privates gave an extremely creditable performance of a couple of scenes from a Puccini opera. These boys have many odd little habits. They are tough as nails on the surface, but their letters to their girls (which I have to censor) simply burst with sentiment. They also cover up the bottom of the letter with X's, as we used to do as children. I am strange to them, but they have tried to make me feel at home, and I am sure will have confidence in me on the field.

It won't be long before I am in the show right up to my neck, but for the time being I have had considerable time to collect my thoughts. The even tenor of camp life is only disturbed by those infernal robot bombs, which buzz overhead from time to time with Tempests on their tails. Then Crash!—and perhaps a rush of air in your face if it came down within a mile of you. Unpleasant, yes, but not a serious menace to the war effort.

Well, enough dull military lore, which probably bores you to tears. I am so full of it over here I find it difficult to detach my mind from the job at hand. Germany will be smashed. But it will cost many lives, and plenty of blood, sweat, and tears.

I hope you'll write, but only if it gives you some pleasure. I was only kidding, of course, insisting that you write to keep up my morale. I long ago gave up writing duty letters. Life, at this time, is too cheap and possibly too short. I wish you every success in the wonderful world of music. I like your idea of giving music freely to others. Like Shakespeare's *Mercy*, it blesseth him that gives and him that takes. Do you remember in Saroyan's *The Human Comedy* when Ulysses brother says Ulysses will be a great man, his mother corrects him—"Ulysses is great now." That is having faith in the fundamental dignity of mankind.

How I go on, Maurine, when some foolish notion crosses my mind. My thoughts are simple enough. But I fail when I try to convey them with simplicity. If I were like my Welshmen, I would say what I mean and mean it, despite original spelling. But I know what I mean and can't say it—not now anyway. Please don't think me mad.

“Happy is the moron
He doesn’t give a damn
I wish I were a moron
My Gosh, perhaps I am!”

Sincerely,
Don

4th Bn. Welch Rgt.
England
[undated]

Dear Joe, Vim, and Jean:

Knowing Jack had written you I didn’t think you would mind if I left my letter a little later.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything—above all for having given us the feeling that we have something to fight for in England as well as in Canada.

We both enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. I am particularly grateful to you for making Jack more or less a member of the family. He was feeling rather lonely over here and your kindnesses gave his morale a terrific boost. I have one piece of good news. We are both going into action together, having been chosen to go with the unit rather than to reinforcements, and we are rather proud to have been so selected.

Jean—don’t lose your delightful sense of humour so aptly employed in your note to Jack. My heart bleeds for you poor lassies heaving my monstrosity of a trunk about the place.

Please don’t count on hearing from us again for quite some time. God bless you all and your happy English home, and I look forward, God willing, to enjoying your warm-heartedness again.

Love,
Don

*To drum-beat and heart-beat
A soldier marches by;
There is color in his cheek,
There is courage in his eye.*

Finch's "Nathan Hale"

4th Bn. Welch Regt.
[undated]

Dear Joe:

Just a note Joe to let you know we are on our way. I shall mail this letter to-morrow in France.

Last night, my last night in England, I spent in a little pub near our camp, sipping the occasional beer and enjoying the marvellous singing of the lads in my company. Unlike most soldiers, these Welsh lads have a genuine love of good music and good song, and have little interest in the smutty type of song heard in most camps.

I have become very fond of my lads in the short time I have been with them and have every confidence in them. Beneath their rough and ready exterior they are kind-hearted and generous to a fault, and each, in his awkward way, has a message of love and good cheer for his sweetheart in every letter.

I said goodbye to England on a glorious sunlit afternoon. All along the route to our embarkation point civilians, old and young, waved and smiled encouragement and good cheer. It was hard to believe, as we passed through smiling little villages basking in the sunshine, that we were off to the wars.

No mail has reached us for quite some time but I hope to hear from everyone when my mail catches up to me in France.

I have been separated from Jack for quite some time, but soon will be seeing him again. If anything should happen to me, I do hope you will have Jack for another visit. He is vastly appreciative of your kindness. Actually he has absolutely no business in a war theatre if the doctors knew the whole story, but there is no stopping him. My very best to Vim and Jean. I hope to see you all again in not too long a time and I'll try and send you an occasional battle report from France.

Sincerely,
Don

27 June, 1944, [Normandy]

Dear Folks:

This time I write from a tiny bivouac on a rain-swept field in France. The guns are booming not far off, but don't feel anxious because they are *our* guns. The planes in the sky are ours, and the gigantic concentration of shipping off the coast of France is ours. In fact this little corner of France has been removed (I hope forever) from the greedy Nazi fist.

The crossing was pleasant and exciting—exciting because of the terrific display of Allied might aimed at the first liberation of Europe.

After a smiling, sunny England, France welcomed us with a dispiriting downpour, and a sea of mud—just like 1914 the veterans would say. I spent my first night on French soil shivering miserably in my gascope in a ditch. No blankets. No nothing. But plenty of rain. Good cheer came with the morn, the sun, and a hot cup of tea. I felt better still as we passed through a French village and received the good old V sign from the French peasants, many of whose homes were a shambles from bombing and shellfire. This afternoon I was further cheered by the purchase of *an egg*—three francs.

All along the route from my camp in England to the embarkation port, English folks, young and old, children and graybeards, waved and smiled their encouragement and farewell. Nobody needed to tell them where we were bound. I felt greatly cheered.

We should be getting our mail in to-day or tomorrow, and I am counting on getting something from Canada. If not I shall blame the postal authorities and keep on waiting.

Nothing seems of any great importance to me now but the winning of the war and the sooner the better. This soldiering is unpleasant, but not half so bad as you probably imagine it to be. This time we are playing for keeps, which provides an element of enthusiasm and excitement formerly lacking.

Well folks, my batman, with whom I share rations in the field, has brewed up some mess or other which I had better stow away to keep out the French weather.

There is much I should like to tell you if I could. I doubt if you would need more than two guesses to place me correctly on a map. Just read the papers and you'll probably know more about what I'm doing than I do myself. Because my horizons are limited to my 36 singing Welshmen who are with me all the way.

Please don't worry about me Mother. There are hundreds of thousands of other sons at my side, over my head, or on the seas. Perhaps the job will be done by Xmas. If not, I'll toast you Xmas eve in Paris on expensive champagne. Write me still c/o Joe because I am not allowed to send my unit's name from England. God knows why.

I am well and happy that I am where I belong,

All my love,

Don

P.S. After sealing the letter opened it again to acknowledge receipt of two letters—just arrived in France. One from you Mother, dated June 1 and addressed to Sussex. Another from Dorothy bearing dates from May 17 to May 25. Very cheering even if somewhat out of date. Sorry about Mr. Woodman. After all, though, he did have a long and satisfying life. Thanks for news of Roy's baby. First I'd heard. Glad you liked the picture. Hardly looked at it myself I was in such a hurry at the time.

Cheers,

Don

27 June, 1944, [Normandy]

Dear Roy:

Just a brief note to let you know that (1) I am in France pitting my wits against the Hun and (2) that I now know of the successful arrival of your first daughter. Congratulations to you both and a pat on the head for Peter.

My crossing to France was a big day in my life. Gerry was not to be seen on the land, in the air, or on the sea. But my God you should have seen our shipping!

France welcomed me with rain and mud and I spent the first night shivering unhappily in an uninspiring ditch—sans blankets. Things picked up the next day and I now am getting into the swing of an old campaigner. Sorry this is such a sorry note but I have much to do and a leaky bivouac is hardly conducive to literary splendor. Congrats, old man. Hope a letter from you will reach me soon.

Cheers,

Don

29 June, 1944, [Normandy]

Dear J. L.

Within the limitations imposed by security, I'll try and tell you a little about what life is like in France.

First, let me set the scene. I write in a homemade bivouac where I make my Headquarters and sleep. Nearby, the platoon cook is brewing a spot of char (tea) for the men who are hard at work. I would have made a much better private soldier if I had spent a lifetime digging ditches instead of digging around for words and phrases. The vehicle is nearby, but you would not know it was there unless you stepped on it. The fine art of camouflage. My trusted bike helps support the bivouac. My mortar commander is away to a nearby farm to buy some fresh milk and apple cider (very good). He has his little French phrase book with him to facilitate the transaction. The Germans didn't get *everything*. The French fall into several categories: enthusiastically with us; mugwumps with us because we are now top dogs; the apathetic; and the enemy agents and snipers about whom we don't know a great deal. There is inevitably infiltration of agents into Allied positions. Life in the field is busy and it will be tough when I go further forward. Things are quiet here, but the fighting is ruthless. An eye for an eye.

To return to the French, I was greatly reassured by the spontaneous welcome we received in one French town (familiar to newspaper readers) as we passed through it. From young and old came smiles and V signs—the good old Churchill gesture.

Believe me, Jim, we have a firm footing in France and are here to stay. The seas are ours and the shipping concentrations would take your breath away. The skies are ours except for the occasional Nazi raider. As soon as he appears the Spits are on his tail or the flak bursts all around him. Saw one rather exciting dog-fight yesterday. Mustangs and Fock Wolfes. Guess the winner. Inevitably the ground will be ours. I don't know any secrets, but I do know we have a lot of tough fighting ahead. I hope it won't take too long or prove too expensive. (There goes the baritone "carumph" of naval shelling. Somebody must be feeling uncomfortable.) (Well, well, here's Morris with the cider—will you have a sip?)

Sometimes I find it hard to believe I am in a war, and not just on a camping trip. The trouble is my men—as soldiers will do—have the same feeling, and I must be on their tails quite a bit to see that necessary things are done and necessary precautions taken. I think we'll all learn a lot *faster* when the stuff starts flying in our direction.

Quite a transition from Prince George, B. C., but I had had my stomach full of playing tin soldier. In the meantime, I am healthy, happy and enjoying the experience as much as anyone can enjoy war. So a toast to the Loot-Comm. with cider.

Cheers,

Don

29 June, 1944 [Normandy]

Dear Frank & Norm:

Well, J. K. and I are sitting in a bivouac “somewhere in France,” and we both agree it is somewhat different from Prince George. We both came with our unit, not as reinforcements. J. K. is in the Carrier platoon and yours truly has a rifle platoon.

France is quite pleasant, except that I understand the army is using live rounds on its schemes and people sometimes get hit. Some Spitfires and Fock Wolfes had a little tussle overhead this afternoon, and J. K. maintains they were actually firing at each other in anger. It was realistic enough to bring us out of our slit trenches for a look see.

We’ve just been talking over old times with a bottle of French cider to ease our “droopin’ spirits and failin’ strength.” (“Let’s have another pull,” says J. K., with the old chuckle—“it’s real moon!”) The wine cost five francs of “invasion” money. An egg—if you can get one—costs three. Which would you rather do, Norm, eat or drink?

At the moment we’re not exactly in Gerry’s backyard, but we’re not so very far from him either. I don’t know (out of ink until the armistice) how many Nazis we’ll score, but we certainly intend to have a “go at him” as the British say.

From stories we have heard over here the Canadians did a grand job of fighting in the invasion, but took quite a beating. Our dear old unit, Frank, was cut up a bit. J. K. and I had a few long ones in London not long ago with Major Miller who is at C.M.H.Q. and heard quite a bit about the old gang. They are here, there, and everywhere. J. K. and I were on our way to a play when we dropped in on Miller and never got to the play. Incidentally, we just got out of London before the robots started dropping, but plenty have dropped not far from us. Unpleasant. Well, I must get back to this business of fighting a war. J. K. sends his best, along with mine, to Arni and McKibbon and Ames.

Cheers,

Don

Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, July 2—(AP)—The German Command has thrown 11 divisions—including a panzer corps from Russia—into the furious defence of Caen, but lost at least 40 tanks and hundreds of men in a single day of vain ram-thrusts against the British wedge of steel southwest of that fortress city . . . despite this power, Rommel's repeated hammer blows were shattered by the British defences. The Germans to-day gave up at least temporarily, the effort to break the salient thrown across the Odon River southwest of Caen . . .

One assault at 4 a.m. Sunday met a "torrent of steel that threw the enemy into confusion and drove him back before he even reached the British lines," and after that the Nazi attack slackened.

3rd July, 1944 [Normandy]

Dear Mother:

Your first letter written directly to me in England reached me yesterday on one of the battlefields in France—and you have no idea how cheering it was to hear from home amid this blood, sweat, toil, and tears—even though your letter was dated June 1st.

The delays in our letters were caused of course by invasion preparations and the mail service should by now be speeded up.

Yes, Mother, I received both your letters via Sussex, N. B., which were very welcome.

A lot of things have happened since I wrote you last, security forbids me to tell you the details of my battle experiences, but I will have some great stories to tell you when I get home. I have been in some very sticky fighting, but should be due for a rest soon. The important thing is that J. K. and I have not had a scratch and have no intention of getting one if we can help it.

At the moment I am resting in a straw-filled dugout while a typical French drizzle pelters down outside. I haven't enjoyed many of the amenities of life lately, such as sleep, a bed, tasty meals etc. but we never go hungry or miss our spot of tea.

I have no idea how the war is going generally. I am only concerned with my platoon front, flanks, and rear, enemy shell-fire and the damned snipers. Somehow or other it all seems rather unreal, but it definitely isn't. The Germans are on their way to defeat alright, but their resistance can scarcely be termed "light."

Well, I am very tired, have a chance to grab some sleep so am not going to pass it by. Wait until I go back up the line and I will write you a newsier letter.

All my love,
Don

Allied Supreme Headquarters, July 3—(B U P)—The British were reported regrouping in order to relieve the weary troops who have fought off 25 fierce German thrusts against their bulge below Caen . . .

4 July, 1944 [Normandy]

Dear Mother:

I wrote you yesterday from the battlefield but it was not a very adequate letter because I was very tired and rather depressed.

To-day I am much happier for several reasons. First I am L.O.B. for a couple of days (left out of battle). When you are L.O.B. you are sent back to a rear area for a proper rest, good meals and a chance to tidy up. Secondly I received three letters from the family—one from you dated a few days after D-Day; a D-Day note from Dad and a letter dated May 10 from Marion.

To-day, for the first time in many weary days, I had my breakfast in bed in my tent and slept till noon, washed and shaved in hot water and changed my socks and underwear. Wonderful!

I am sorry you had to hear from me first via Jim, but I wrote you at the same time—earlier I believe, but I may not have had an airmail form at the time. We are now about a month behind each other in news. It seemed odd your congratulating me on my satisfactory posting in England, when I have been enjoying the mud and messiness of France for some little time.

As you will gather from yesterday's letter it didn't take me long to get into action. I was amused at your warning me to duck when the bombs and shells come, because we all have been doing plenty of that lately. We not only duck, we scramble into the deepest slit trench available, and try to hide

under our steel helmets. From now on Mother my home is a slit trench, and my furniture is on my back, but I have too many men's lives on my hands to worry about the amenities of life. It's a dirty job which has to be done and I don't think it will take very long. Common danger engineers a mutual fellowship and respect which is one of the rare satisfactions of war. (The cook just brought me nice stew, some biscuits and a ruddy 'ot cup o' tea, blime—which I eat as I write).

I should be unhappy if I thought you were worrying about me Mother. Forget about the war until I come home with a Welsh accent and an inordinate appetite for tea. I am not worrying myself. If a bullet or a shell has my name on it, well, that's that, but I shall take your advice and keep my head down.

Thank you Dad for your note which you wrote on D-Day without having heard from me. It was very thoughtful of you.

By now I expect you have all heard from me, and have a better picture of my activities. In a day or so I go back to the front, and another officer of the company is L.O.B. Meantime I am enjoying the full fruits of rest after toil.

How is Roy's daughter? Interested to hear about his possible shift. Expect a letter from him any day.

All my love,
Don

4th July, 1944, [Normandy]

Dear Jim:

At the moment Jim I am L.O.B. (left out of battle). That means you go to a rear area for a couple of days to rest, relax and clean up. Another purpose served is that in the event of your company officers being wiped out there is always (or as often as possible) one L.O.B. to take over. It applies to NCO's and OR's as well.

Security regulations forbid one to describe a battle until after fourteen days. But I am sure I will not be giving the enemy any useful information if I give you a few hints about what I and my men have been through.

Since my arrival in France I have taken part in some of the fiercest fighting since D-day. It has been my highly dubious pleasure to have been sniped at, shelled and mortared for hours on end and strafed by enemy planes. Oh yes, there are still two or three planes left in the Luftwaffe. I have

also enjoyed the equally dubious pleasure of existing day after day on an hour or two of sleep with my home and my castle a slit trench. In other words I have had my baptism of fire and I can solemnly assure that it was not pleasant. Certain elements of Hitler's gangsters fight like hell and I have been dealing with them—not single handed of course.

I am not the revengeful type but there is a small matter of a couple of wooden crosses over a slit trench, once occupied by one of my sections, which I would like to take up with the Nazis when I go back to the front. My particular sector took a little more than it handed out for a couple of days but the tide is changing fast.

Last nite my sergeant-major pointed at a long, lean, sunburned chap working on a carrier near Bn. Hq. and said "That guy better not come near our company in that outfit or he'll be shot at." The chap in question, who turned out to be J. K. Brown, was wearing a rain-suit similar to the German sniper outfit and you should have seen the expression on his face when I warned him.

J. K. is doing fine for a lad who was discharged from the *reserve* army as medically unfit and was three times refused enlistment in the active army. His immediate superior is now dead.

Incidentally this letter is *not* for circulation among the family. It sounds a bit grisly but actually we have been very lucky and there have been few casualties.

By the way, a battle area is no place for a person with a sensitive nostril because the smell is enough to lift your hat off. Not that there are bodies all over the place but there are hundreds of dead animals killed by shellfire. Mostly cows.

Well, old boy, it's getting dark, and I'm getting tired, even though I slept my fill last nite and today. You live on your nervous energy up front, and when you get a rest the reaction leaves you rather limp.

My very best and hope to hear from you soon.

Cheers,

Don

*. . . but a man must be something sometime bright and clear,
like a plowshare in the sun, or a mountain above the cloud.*

Anderson's "Key Largo"

5 July, 1944 [Normandy]

Dear Dorothy:

You may find this paper a bit wrinkled and dirty, and you might be amused if I told you why. My writing kit is all I have left of my 70 pounds of baggage which I brought to France.

Gerry dropped one of his big ones on the corner of my platoon's equipment dump, and when I went to get my stuff a few days later I found my blankets strewn in little bits over a hedge, feathers from my pillow all over the damned place, my running shoes perched on a bush-top and bits of underwear and shirts here, there and everywhere. By one of those oddities of war, my writing case and one pair of underwear shorts is all I have left, with the exception of what I wear on my back. "C'est la guerre." Anyway I was worrying about what stuff I should take to France with me and what I should leave, so now the problem have been solved for me—if somewhat arbitrarily.

I'm almost afraid to mention there is a war on in France (sorry out of ink) since I learned a letter I wrote to Marion was returned to Joe's address by the censor. It seems I said something about a few bombs having fallen in London. According to the censors, no one in Canada must be aware of the fact that all of Goering's bombs didn't drop into the Thames or the North Sea.

Well, old girl, your gentle natured brother has seen a bit of fighting and I hasten to assure you that this invasion is not altogether a triumphal march into Berlin. The German is a skilful and fanatical fighter, and will take some beating. But beaten he will be.

Don't worry your head about me. Everyone is in this war in some capacity. It's a matter of luck who gets hurt and who doesn't.

The France I have seen so far consists of a giant concentration of Allied war materials, wrecked buildings, rubble, dead cattle and mud roads—not the France described in tourist literature.

My reaction to war is probably typical. I have the impression that Gerry is firing thousands of shells and bombs with the sole intention of

exterminating me personally. However I have managed to remain pretty cool and get about my job efficiently. And that's what I'm here for.

All my love,
Don

Please convey my regrets to D. S. on the death of his father—a grand old gentleman.

5th July, 1944 [Normandy]

[To Miss Jean Livingstone]

Dear Jean:

Thanks for your cheerful note containing the cheerless news that the censors think I am giving away military secrets to my young sister. I shall hasten to correct my error by informing her that no bombs have ever fallen on England—only in the North Sea—and that the rumour current in the newspapers that France has been invaded, is completely without foundation.

At the moment Jean I am L.O.B. (left out of battle) for a couple of days' rest. It has been tough going, and there is tougher going still to come but Jack and I are faring alright and intend to keep on handing it out (and taking it I must add), until the dawn breaks again over Europe.

In the meantime you had better make up your mind whether you are increasing in longitude or latitude or merely in favor with God and man.

Once again thanks for your kind letter, and remember, a note from you or Joe or Vim is always welcome on the battlefield.

Best of love to you all—
my adopted family in England.
Don

5 July, 1944 [Normandy]

Dear Marion:

The enclosed letter from Jean may explain why you have not heard from me before. For all I know, all my letters home may have suffered the same fate.

I believe I made a reference in my letter to the fact that one or two bombs fell on London during the 1940 blitz. Apparently this information is of vital importance to the enemy, who thought all his bombs fell into the North Sea.

If you have heard rumors that flying bombs have landed in England or that France has been invaded I suggest you keep it to yourself because the British censorship would undoubtedly consider that information of urgent secrecy.

Well, I wrote you a letter anyway, so don't feel badly. The trouble with censors is that they have petty minds commensurate with their petty jobs. It is of little importance to them that a soldier—3000 miles from his home—cannot communicate with his relatives because he prefers to write about real things rather than dole out the ridiculous sentimental slop to which British soldiers are restricted by their exalted security officers. Probably none of them had any censorship experience in civil life as I had at BUP in Montreal. If I find any more of my mail is being tampered with by benighted idiots I'll write old Price Montague, Adj-Gen. of the Canadian Army and ask him, as a fraternity brother, to put his seal of approval on my letters. Well, well, that was some blast. If a censor reads this letter I hope he won't feel insulted because there are exceptions in the ranks.

At the moment, Marion, I am L.O.B. (left out of battle) for a few days' rest. I have seen some bitter fighting and expect to see plenty more. But I am getting pretty swift at diving into that old slit trench so don't worry about me. J. K. is also fine and returns your regards.

I received your letter dated June 10 yesterday and it was very welcome. Anyone you choose for my brother-in-law is alright by me, and Alan seems to be the one. You have my congratulations in advance. Also congrats on your dubious skill at golf.

Sorry to hear about Jim Ringer whom I think I know, if it is the same one.

Have a good holiday this summer and try not to dump the sailboat if you use it.

Give my best regards to Chickie (I sent them in the last letter which the censor so politely returned) and tell her to keep piling on the amatol. We can use detonators here.

Just wrote Dorothy a note telling her about losing all my kit when a bomb exploded on a luggage dump. My worldly goods were scattered over

the hedgerow in bits and pieces like Xmas tree decorations. It's a great war while it lasts and I hope to hell it doesn't last much longer.

Drop me a line once in a while and I'll hope the censors will allow me an occasional communication with you.

Cheers old girl
Don

Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, July 6—(CP)—The greatest mass of German manpower ever concentrated on a narrow front in this or the First Great War was thrown today against the British and Canadian forces around Caen, the German eastern anchor on the Normandy battle line that bars the road to Paris. Supreme Headquarters said one German division on slightly less than three miles of front now confronts the British and Canadian forces in the Caen sector.

7 July, 1944 [Normandy]

Dear Roy:

The last few days have been good to me. My mail, delayed for so long, has suddenly come showering down upon me and it is a very welcome rain indeed.

Congratulations to you and Bette on the safe and sunny arrival of Mary Elizabeth and the rapid strides toward manhood of Peter Duncan.

Sorry to hear about the casualties you mention. Heard about Jim Ringer from Marion. I have seen a little fighting here in France and it isn't pleasant. It shakes you a bit when someone you have been fighting alongside suddenly makes his peace with God. Germany is now fighting a lost cause on three fronts, but such is Teutonic stubbornness that many of us will have to be shot up before she admits she is beaten.

At the moment Roy, I am resting up before returning to the line. There was no time wasted after I set foot in France before I was in the thick of it. However, so far, J. K. Brown and I have managed to duck successfully.

Hope you got my previous letter but I have already had one returned from the censor for a perfectly absurd reason so I am none too confident. The censors, like barnacles on the side of a fighting ship, are always with us with their pompous ways and petty tyrannies.

The summer season in France has few attractions for the tourist in khaki. Plenty of ruins to see, but not the kind dealt with by Baedeker. There is lots of rain, and mud, and Nazis behind every other hedgerow. And everywhere there are tons and tons of Allied war material. The stuff is really pouring in and one day things will open up high, wide, and handsome.

Glad to hear news of Bert and will drop her a line c/o Officer I/C records. Who knows but what I shall fall into her fair hands for reconstruction when I collect my bit of shrapnel.

Please give my regards to Elinor and Elizabeth and extend my sympathies to poor Shirl. Better luck to her next time. The invasion knocked out my chances of seeing the boilermaker. Is he in action yet?

You might be amused to learn that when I went to get my kit recently the only item I managed to salvage was my writing case and half a suit of underwear. A Gerry shell had draped it in bits and pieces over a hedgerow in Xmas tree fashion. I had too damn much stuff anyway.

Well keep the home fires burning for us, old boy, and I'll try and look after my own neck as well as 36 others. Have had a little bad luck in that respect already. Pick me out a nice bride for my home-coming, because after this I think I'll settle for the domestic life.

Cheers,

Don

Thanks for the note Bette.

If a message comes to me . . . I shall believe the words of it, but nothing more. And I shall not need to weep, because I know there can be no killing of my son.—“The Human Comedy.”

July 7, 1944 [Normandy]

Dear Dad:

It never rains but it pours, and lately I have been showered with letters and with good old-fashioned Normandy rain.

Received your letter of June 23 today which is not bad and proves that a direct address appears to get by. If another letter reaches me direct I'll cease using Joe's address, which was just a security measure.

Incidentally am trying to send this airmail although I haven't the proper folder. If it goes it will reach you before my last letter.

As I told you in my last letter I wasn't long in France before I was right in the thick of it and I can assure you we have a tough job ahead of us. The Germans know the game is up but they fight back like the fool fanatics they are—particularly the youth.

The main thing is that I am alright (so is J. K.) and have been enjoying several days respite from the line. Have now heard from you all and it is impossible to exaggerate the morale-boosting effect of letters, no matter how inconsequential. Men will go without sleep for days on end, live on cold food, and exist in slimy slit trenches not knowing whether the next shell has their name on it, and they won't complain. But their morale goes down when they lose touch with their wives, families and sweethearts. Such is the strange fabric of human nature.

Last night was very heartening. I am not violating security when I mention this raid because every person in southern England, every soldier in France, and every Nazi within miles of Caen must have seen the swarms of Allied planes that blasted Caen last night. With better weather we should have much more of the same and it will help a lot. The ack-ack was a wonderful sight but I can assure you it did virtually no damage.

I don't like asking for cigarettes because for some reason or other I never get them. Jim's—mailed weeks ago—haven't arrived, nor have Mother's. But I could certainly use them.

Cheers,

Don

8th July, 1944 [Normandy]

Dear Joe:

Thank you both for your notes, one of which I received the day before yesterday, the second yesterday enclosing Jim's cable and Mother's letter. Very decent of Jim to cable wasn't it. There is nothing he wouldn't do for me and it has been that way all our lives.

I got Jean's breezy letter and replied with a few wry comments on the censors.

Joe there are one or two things you might send me. You can see by the wrinkles on this paper it has been shaken up a bit. As a matter of fact my writing case was the only item I salvaged from my kit after Gerry dropped a big one on our equipment dump. Best to get to the point, paper and envelopes are rather scarce in these parts and a small stock would be greatly

appreciated. Also both Mother and Jim have sent cigarettes which haven't reached me. A hundred smokes to tide me over would be very welcome indeed—no more, because my stock should arrive any time. Mail in seems to be pretty swift but mail out much slower, no doubt due to our friends the censors.

At the moment Joe I am enjoying a rest before I go back to the line, and am already getting fed-up with it and worrying about my Platoon. Ah well, there's still lots of fighting ahead, and I don't doubt that I shall have my full share of it.

What a heartening sight in the skies last night as our bombers thundered over Caen! I don't think Gerry will be able to stomach a great deal more of that sort of thing. Well, my very best to you all, Jack and I both appreciate the notes we get from you. By the way, unless you are enclosing a note, you only need change the address on my mail and post it again. If you can get hold of any airmail forms like the envelope containing Mother's letter they would be very helpful to me,

Best of love to all,
Don

P.S.—It hasn't taken me long to learn to keep my head down, believe me!

Supreme Headquarters, July 8—(B U P)—British and Canadian troops stormed the defences of Caen at dawn today in an all-out offensive designed to clear the road to Paris . . . At dusk yesterday, more than 450 heavy bombers of the R.A.F. and R.C.A.F. struck the first blow of the long awaited offensive dropping thousands of tons of explosives on German strong-points . . .

9th July, 1944 [Normandy]

[to Nursing Sister Bert Argue]

Dear Miss Nightingale,

Surprising how little birds bring news to us in the slit trenches. Via Roy, to home, to here I learn that little Bertie (I'll bet you hate diminutive terms of endearment—typically English) has set foot on the soil of Mother England, presumably breathless, bug-eyed and excited. I write this c/o

Officer in charge of Records in the hope that it will eventually sift its way through the various bureaucracies into your healing hands.

You have my address now Bert so I shall expect a letter from you in not too many weeks. Eventually I'll get out of this hell-hole, either by a leave or by catching a piece of shrapnel.

I can scarcely say I am leading the life of Reilly out here, but I'm getting enough to eat, enough to shoot at and the most modern, up-to-date, slit trench with 20th century fixtures.

Perhaps I shall fall into your loving hands to be pieced together when I fail to duck in time. Will you handle me gently sister, "as the potter thumps his wet clay"? Or have you already lost your gentler nature amid the bestial duties of war-time nursing? Anyway we might manage a meeting, in which case I shall dine you at La Coquile in London and wine you at the Savoy, and we will have a wonderful time, world without end. Amen.

A kiss for good luck
Don

P.S. It *is* a bit sticky out here.

By Ross Munro.

With the British and Canadians on the Caen Front.

July 10th—British troops launched a new attack at dawn to-day striking from the Odon River line southwest of Caen towards the Orne while Canadian and British troops in Caen improved their positions in the city and wiped out the last pockets of Nazi resistance.

. . . I know you will meet this bitter experience with the same courage and dignity . . . From Don's letter to Mrs. Salmon.

Sgt. Brimble, M. 3970611 A. Coy.
4th Welch Regt., c/o A.P.O., B.W.E.F.
11 July, 1944

My dear Mr. and Mrs. Duncan,

It is with my deepest regret that I have to write you a letter of this nature, please forgive me if I may sound brusque, but I must confess my surroundings are none too cheerful and secondly I'm not a very good writer

of these types of letters, I shall have to be hard and I hope you will understand and realize the whole thing.

Your son was my Platoon Commander for a very short time and met with an accident which proved fatal. I know you will be informed through the War Office of his death, but it was his and our request that which ever met his fate or misfortune we would write to the next of kin.

It was an agreement between your son and us as a Platoon so I hope you don't mind me writing to you.

Well, I might say we all feel it very bad and can't quite realize that he has left us, as the boys of the old Platoon got on very well indeed with him and respected him in every way that was possible, he was and did prove to be a "Great Guy" and was known to us as "Dunc" a little unusual maybe but he was one of us and a part of the team which had a job of work to do. I can say this with great pride that he will always be remembered by his boys and myself, that never once did he forgot his duty to us, we were first and foremost in everything that concerned him and his Platoon, he was an Officer, which the lads take to.

The lads and myself buried him in an orchard which we now hold, it's not a very picturesque place, we buried him in as good a grave as is permitted under these conditions. It really looked nice even tho we were at War, they turfed it and placed a pot of roses over the grave, then we secured some whitewood from a nearby village and made a cross of it, really it is the best I've seen anyone do since I've been in this battle.

You needn't worry about his burial, it was all in the very best of respect and honour to the dead. I am trying to get a photograph if possible of his burial ground, which I will forward to you without fail.

I must close now with the regret of the whole Platoon and myself on your sad bereavement.

Yours,

M. Brimble, Pln. Sgt.

(From the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 21st July, 1944)

LIEUT. D. A. DUNCAN DIES IN FRANCE

Lieutenant Donald Albert Duncan, 28, of Winnipeg, is officially reported to have died on active service in France with the British Army, July 10, according to word received by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. C. Duncan, 75 Canora Street.

He was an officer of the Winnipeg Light Infantry, but when the British Army called for Canadian junior officers last spring, he volunteered and went on loan to an Imperial regiment.

His platoon sergeant, Sgt. M. Brimble, says in a letter to his parents, that Don "was a great guy, who won the friendship and respect of the men in his unit and put them first in all that concerned him." Lieutenant Duncan was buried in an orchard in British-occupied France.

Outstanding Student

Don Duncan attended Laura Secord and Gordon Bell schools. An outstanding student, he held Isbister scholarships at the University of Manitoba for three years, 1934 to 1937, and in addition, a German-Canadian scholarship in 1935-1936. While at university he was active in hockey and was a member of the Alpha Tau chapter of Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity.

After graduation he joined the staff of the Free Press, serving in both advertising and news departments. Later he worked for the British United Press in Montreal.

In 1942, he resigned his commission with the Winnipeg Light Infantry and went on active service in the ranks with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, later serving with the W.L.I.'s 1st (active) battalion on the West Coast.

Survivors include his parents at home; one brother, Pay. Lt.-Cmdr. James L. Duncan, R.C.N.V.R.; two sisters, Mrs. D. S. Woodman, 55 Elm Park, and Miss Marion Duncan, Montreal.

4th Welch Rgt.—B.W.E.F.
11, 7, 44

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Duncan,

It is with a very heavy heart I have to write and tell you, that your son, Don, has been killed in action. Donald was posted to this battalion about a fortnight before the invasion started and landed with us, together with his friend, Jack Brown, who were inseparable and was posted to "A" Coy. In the little time he was with us he became part and parcel of the battalion and did his job extremely well, and with great efficiency.

His Company Commander was wounded the same day as your son was killed and only that day he had told me how well Don was doing.

His platoon, even in the short time he was with us, got to know him well and are very down at the great loss they have suffered. We all know so well how much we owe to Canada; and the help these boys who joined our regiments have given us will never be able to be valued. Don was killed instantaneously by a bullet, and was buried by his platoon and the service held by our padre. Jack Brown will write you more fully, as I am sending him back today to do this.

Excuse my very short note, but we are in the thick of battle, otherwise I would be able to write you more fully.

Once more, please accept the deepest sympathy of this battalion, who have lost a splendid soldier, friend, and very gallant gentleman.

Yours very sincerely,
Geoffrey Burnett, Major

Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

St. Matthew.

Lt. J. K. Brown—4th Bn. The Welch Regt.
British West. Exp. Force
A.P.O. England
13th July, 1944

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Duncan:—

You will no doubt have already had the sad news that Don was killed a few days ago. I don't quite know what to say, except join the many others who will offer their sympathy. I feel worse than I thought possible, so can imagine how you must feel. He was killed instantly by a bullet and though only a few hundred yards away I was not told until the following morning. The unit padre conducted the burial service and the resting place is in the corner of a small field bordered on one side by the village church. Several of Don's boys are also buried there.

Don had been out of the line for a few hours' rest and we had a chat as he passed me. We both agreed that the actual fighting was worse than we had imagined and decided that we did not expect to survive. Don made the statement at that time that the effort would be well worth the sacrifice, if our families and country could be spared in our time the total destruction that has become the trademark of the century as we have seen here in Normandy.

Don's friends were legion and all agree that he was too fine to survive. That seems to be the way of things, I guess. I forgot to mention that the town of the tragedy is Grainville sur Odon. If permitted to survive I will re-visit the spot before leaving France. If there is anything I can do please let me know. Again please accept my expression of sympathy and convey same to the brother and sisters.

Sincerely,
Jack Brown

3964321 L/C Bowery, J.
4th Bn. Welch Regt.
A Company, Army P.O.
B. L. A.
July, 1944

Dear Mrs. Duncan:

I am just writing these few lines to say how deeply sorry I am and the boys in having lost such a good officer. I am not much good at writing letters, but I want to say this, I haven't known him very long, but he was the grandest man I have ever known, his only concern was for us before himself every time, and we miss him very much. I can just understand how you must be feeling, I don't know whether you are his mother or his wife, but he was a fine man. I can't explain how it happened, we gave him a decent burial in an orchard near Caen. I know this letter will make it hard for you again, bringing back memories but I felt I had to write these few lines to you to

express my deepest regret and sorrow. I can't say any more now, I will say cheerio, please excuse such a short letter but I find it very hard to express my feelings.

Yours truly,
J. Bowery, L/Cpl.

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.—St. John.

[From Sergeant Brimble's letter of August 25th to Don's brother, Jim]

“Pardon me calling your brother ‘Dunc,’ but to me and the lads, we thought it was OK and he never got sore at any time it was used . . . Now to tell you a little more detail of his death—Well sir, the situation was this, after being in France for several days, and under heavy mortar and artillery fire, Mr. Duncan went to L.O.B. (Left Out of Battle), that's customary in the British Army so in event of the company being wiped out, they could form another company or platoon around the L.O.B.s, a kind of reserve if you understand.

Well he arrived back after spending a week there, and there was a move on, and I “recc'd” the Platoon's position that afternoon. He came back from L.O.B. in the evening and we left together for the new position. Apparently from reports we would be subject to mortar fire when we took the position, but I told Dunc where the best axis of advance would be, and it came out tops. Moving tactically he put the Platoon in their disposition without anyone getting hit, and we settled down to the drab and boring job of defending that particular area.

Then making my words come true about your brother, he told me to get some sleep as he would do the duty on that particular night seeing as he'd rested for a week, tho' I may add he applied to come back every day from L.O.B. without success, thinking of me with the Platoon on my hands while he was away.

Anyway, around 0300 hours in the morning there was some firing going on about 500-800 yards to our front. Seemed like a Jerry machine gun so your brother went forward to see that the section was OK and one of the B—— d Hun bullets had his number. I flared until the light was better, and got the Platoon alert to await any idea the Boche had regarding the Platoon

disposition. Well, he didn't do anything but send over plenty of fire which luckily hit no one else thank God.

He was a great loss to us, so in the better light I spoke to the boys and told them what had happened. Well sir, we had gone quite hard to these things and they took it quite well . . . Well sir, I think that's all I can give you of the details, it was quite a small thing we did for him, the little things he did for us made him popular, little things like buying milk, eggs, etc. and not taking our money for it. So there you have it, that's the best I can do, so I hope you'll understand sir. I don't like writing about it, it brings back too many memories, you may think me soft-hearted sir, but things like that get me. All I can say is that your brother was avenged to the fullest . . . when we got to grips with the Boche a few days later . . . we didn't forget Dunc; it was "Don't forgot one for Dunc" and sir let me tell you there were no prisoners taken by his old Platoon. We had that little satisfaction but what we wanted mostly was for Dunc to have led us. We have never had such a good officer in charge of the Platoon . . . no red tape if you know what I mean, that's what we appreciated and liked about him . . . Now I must close, as things are warming up, and my slit trench is a favorite with the stuff flying around . . ."

A man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love.

—Joseph Conrad.

Oliver Jewett—(Principal of Gordon Bell High School)—“Don was a boy who made friends wherever he went. His character and personality were such that no one could ever maintain any enmity or even dislike toward him. He was just a grand lad. We know he must have done extraordinarily well in the Army and would be a wonderful leader of the boys overseas . . . We honor him and will remember him in the years to come.”

Roy Watson—“. . . Don gave me many things; appreciation of good music and good books, his friendship, and now he has given his life . . . Don did give his life for a truth in which he believed; the defence of the family. He defended mine, and we shall never forget him. He is remembered by each one of us in our prayers . . .”

Lieut. Irv. Stevenson, R.C.E.—“. . . I numbered Don as my best friend; always a fellow you could trust to the last. I know I shall miss him a lot . . . it certainly would have been wonderful to have seen him again before he went over, but I’ll always remember Don’s smiling face wherever I go. He was such a darn good fellow, always so thoughtful and generous and full of fun. I had a letter from Don when he first arrived in England suggesting we try and get together. I replied right away and that was the last I heard till I received the sad news. As yet I haven’t entered the ring but when I do I will remember Don’s courage (he was always that way) and I am sure it will make me fight harder.”

Pay-Lieut. Bill Gray, R.C.N.V.R.—“Don had the most companionable sense of humor I have ever enjoyed.”

Harry Tucker—“. . . I always counted Don among my finest friends. Having grown up with him, played with him, and being into all kinds of mischief with him, I got to know him better than a brother. He was always a sport of the highest calibre and a gentleman.”

Lieut. Doug. Simpson, R.C.N.V.R.—“I can’t seem to realize yet that there won’t be another of the grand and clever letters he used to write . . . I’m sure I don’t have to tell you how much Don was loved by his friends . . . we all knew Don was a grand sport, disgustingly clever at practically anything he tackled, and he had a wonderful sense of humor. But there was something else about him that no one spoke of but all sensed very keenly. I’m sure I don’t know what it was, but it drew everyone he knew to him, and without realising it they became his friends. As kids we used to scrap occasionally among ourselves, but never with Don. It really was phenomenal . . . it used to draw us to your house continually (dirty shoes and all). I know he carried that wonderful magnetic quality with him right

through his life and left a trail of close and true friends behind wherever he moved. I really can't finish telling you how much I thought of him, but someday I may build something the architecture of which will have some of Dunc's spirit in it for as long as it lasts on earth."

Lieut. Dick Murray, R.C.N.V.R.—". . . a letter is so distant, and for those of us who cannot express ourselves as clearly and beautifully as Don could, it is so even more inadequate . . . How very wide Don's circle of real friends was, how widely and for how long will his loss be felt among dozens of people we all know, and among other dozens we may never know. Certainly it will be your pride forever that Don grew to be a man whom everybody liked instantly, and whose friendships once made were lasting. Nothing could affect his quiet, retiring manner, and his abhorrence of publicity and limelight seekers. In the last few years our paths seldom crossed, but when they did there was always something especially satisfying; because together we brought back memories from childhood . . . things would come to mind that only we could laugh about, because they had been shared together. From Saturday morning doughnuts at '75,' to Sandy Hook, to the 'Y', to clandestine movies at the 'Tivoli', to our dock at '728,' and to our first beers. The twins had each other and I had Don. I remember one thing so typically Don (we used to grouse good naturedly about a lot of little things)—in the midst of the most extreme hardship he wrote, 'I have too many men's lives on my hands to worry about the amenities of life.' They could not have had a more humane and understanding leader."

Mrs. Fraser McConnel—". . . even in his letters he is thinking of something that could be done to help out the morale of his men. Such is the fine fabric of his nature . . ."

J. R. Livingstone—"His quiet sense of humor, his wit, above all his sterling character . . . He was the type who thought things out . . . He wouldn't hear of my writing to Viscount Bennet to get him a press reporting job, he knew his duty and intended to do it. Don loved England. He thought our traditions and all we stood for worth saving . . . I told Don when he left I was very proud of him and he told Vim he was proud of the message and would live up to it . . . All of us who knew him will honor his memory and hold ourselves just a little more erect when his dear name is mentioned."

Lieut. Donald Best, R.C.N.V.R.—". . . we all lose friends and acquaintances these days . . . but I feel differently about Don. As you know he was one of my inner circle of friends; there are never many at any one time, and the loss of one hurts."

Mrs. Bruce Noyes—“. . . that shy, sweet manner of his, swaggering down the street the way he did.”

Commander H. G. Nares, R.C.N.V.R.—“. . . a proud remembrance of a sterling character. He did his job well. If the people in high places do theirs only half so well, we might take new heart for the world ahead . . .”

Mrs. J. R. Livingstone—“How we loved listening to his funny dry humor.”

Lieut. Ted Burch, C.A.S.F.—“. . . I was a particular friend of Don’s and would like to write and express how sorry I was to hear the news. I last saw Don at Terrace where I was instructing in mountain warfare. Don was in my platoon. You may remember Don telling you back in 1941 how he and I traded jobs back and forth at Wiggins Systems. We were also in the W.L.I. Reserve together, and before that I knew Don at the University. I’m afraid Don was too much of an individualist to be entirely happy in the Army, although I know his sense of humor helped him over many of the tough spots. He was a grand fellow, extremely well-informed and alert, and I think one of the rare people who really enjoy life, despite his expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects of it. He possessed a broad understanding which made him an entertaining and agreeable companion.”

Lt.-Col. H. C. Grant—“The death of your son in action against the enemy recalls to my mind the privilege which was afforded me in interviewing him and recommending him for a commission. I shall never forget the eagerness he displayed and the willingness to become commissioned the hard way. He took the hard way with a smile. To some he appeared to lack the external appearances of aggressiveness demanded of a platoon leader. To me he revealed a tough core of inner purpose which, if challenged, would show to all his true worth. The challenge came and I know he faced it eagerly. He must have been very happy before he fell because he had achieved to the full his supreme ambition to be a leader of men.”

Hugh Newton—“Don and I were very close, if taciturn, friends. Even if we didn’t see much of each other in the last two years, our association at university and in the newspaper business could be regarded as a very sincere friendship. Don, so much more mature in mind than most of us who worked with him, I always found a most enjoyable and intelligent companion. We lived near each other, and later in the same house in Montreal for some months, and I must confess that our nocturnal (though innocent) investigations into the social, cultural, and economic conditions of that gay

and charming city, constituted a definite era in my life and, I think, in his. We always seemed to be working odd shifts together and would often find ourselves at midnight with little to do but while away the hours till dawn, trying to untangle the intricacies of Quebec politics, or arguing Elliott Paul (his *The Last Time I Saw Paris* was a favorite of ours at that time), in some dimly lighted estaminet, speaking bad French to the bartender all the while.

“For all his sense of patriotism, Don hated war and all the stiff orderliness and discipline that went with military service. He wasn’t afraid of war; he, just as any man of intelligence, detested it for its regimentation and stupid slaughter. He accepted, however, his enlistment into the armed services as necessary and inevitable. Oddly, though, for all his detestation of things military, he had a very deep sense of purpose (as his overseas letters showed) and I believe he actually enjoyed the army in the last few months. The tragedy of Rupert Brooke in the last war, was somewhat of a parallel. I think Don knew he wasn’t coming back. It is easy to say this afterwards—but I think I knew, too.

“We had great plans, Don, John and I—our great venture into journalism, and sat up many nights, and laid our schemes, and thrashed them out. Don was a good citizen, a fine soldier, and above all possessed a brilliant, purposeful mind. His guidance, good sense, and his hopes and interest in the future of his country—these will be missed. He was one of the very best friends I ever had, or for that matter, anyone could have.”

Pay-Lt-Commander Peter Nicholson, R.C.N.V.R.—“. . . one of the chosen few who could combine intelligence with high purpose and down to earth humility. People like that never die . . . the mark D. A. D. left in this world is permanent, and we are all a bit richer for his having been here. So long as kindness and self-sacrifice mean anything, so long will Don still be here, for I know he was the essence of both.”

Mrs. George Ford—“He was always so amiable and light-hearted, and had a wonderful capacity to make something comic and irresistibly funny of any situation . . . We are better in spirit for having known him and we can never forget him.”

R. W. Keyserlingk—(British United Press)—“Don had been a very popular member of our organization and on learning the news a little while ago we all felt a personal loss. His memory shall not only remain with us, but remain as an inspiration.”

Lieut. Pat Kelly, C.A.S.F.—“Don was a wonderful man . . .”

Capt. Ian Main—Winnipeg Grenadiers—“. . . these Canadian lads who went with the Imperial Army made a wonderful record, but have been in at all the toughest battles . . . Don did his utmost to help the decent people out of this terrible mess.”

Lieut. Bill Lang—Q.O.C.H. (German prison camp Oflag 7B)—“. . . How proud you must be of the noble part played by Don in the mighty successes we are now gaining. I too feel this pride in my friend Don.”

Lieut. Frank Emma—W.L.I.—“This is my sixth attempt at writing . . . I find words frail things indeed to express just what I thought of Don . . . sufficient to say that I have lost a truly worthwhile friend.”

Dorothy and Arni Coulter—“He endeared himself to all who knew him. It is impossible to picture that group of boys without Don, the ‘Deacon,’ as they loved to call him. It won’t be the same now they can’t remind Don to get up in time for parade, remember to wear his hat, pick up his kit bag. The war seems so foreign to his nature, and yet he, more than the majority, knew what he was fighting for, and how great the sacrifice.”

Mrs. J. R. Murray—“His fun at sailing . . . reading so beautifully (that it almost made me weep) German poetry, etc., in fact everything about Don was so perfect and delightful. I loved Don so much—and you know how much I have always admired his qualities of kindness, gentleness, and his sense of humor and love of life . . . I really have never felt the death of anyone so keenly. . . . Don somehow will always live for me—I can just see the tilt of his head when talking—all his charming ways, and his never failing sweetness.”

Miss Jean Duncan—[Don’s Aunt]—“. . . my last memory of him is very lovely. Don took me to the train for Brandon after my hospitalization in Winnipeg last September. I can still see him as he strode through the station with a step and stride befitting a soldier such as he proved to be. While we waited to be allowed upstairs to the train he excused himself, and left to speak to a friend. This friend was a private soldier standing alone some distance away. They chatted for a while and when Don came back he said he didn’t want the chap to think he would overlook him just because Don wore an officer’s uniform. That to me was an example of the fine spirit Don always displayed toward his fellowmen . . .”

Fraser McConnel—“. . . the almost smothering pride that wells up when you think how, and for what, Don died.”

Pay-Lieut. Jack Campbell, R.C.N.V.R.—“. . . all the sordid things that go into the make-up of the militarist never figured at all in any of Don's thoughts and actions. Life for Don was always made up of the beautiful things; good books, a gang of lads before an open fire with a few beers, or a sail at Sandy Hook with a spanking breeze to tilt the boat . . .”

Les. Bishop—(Winnipeg Free Press)—“. . . Don was an awfully fine boy and all of us at the Free Press were very fond of him. It was a privilege to know him.”

Mrs. Aleda Hamilton—“He did his part and nobly in the forwarding of a great cause.”

Lieut. Bill Poole, R.C.N.V.R.—“. . . I don't suppose anyone liked war, army, etc. less than Don. He was a foreigner in all that.”

Martin O'Gorman—“We cannot forget that there is a little corner of a Normandy orchard which will forever be an inspiration to you when confronted with the aftermath of the war.”

Miss Maurine Stuart—“I shall always remember what a truly fine person he is.”

Capt. Peter Excell—4th Welch Rgt.—“. . . I am writing this, not only to tender my sympathy to you in your loss, but also on behalf of the remainder of the company, and his own Platoon in particular. As you know Donald only came to us a short while before leaving England, but in the short time he was with us we all came to know him as a man of high ideals and integrity, and a most charming and likable personality. His loss to us, both officers and men, as a friend and a leader, is great . . . in the days that have passed since his death and in the days that are to come we have not forgotten, nor will we forget him.”

John Bullock—“His death is Canada's loss because we have too few of his calibre . . . think what that boy could have done in his own quiet way for Canadian unity if he had come back. Lives like his don't die, they go on in some infinite way . . . what deed is better, or what charity is greater, than to make the supreme sacrifice for your fellowmen that they may be free, and live without fear, and be happy.”

Capt. Garfield Evans—4th Welch Rgt.—“. . . we buried him in what was once, and I am sure will be again, a lovely French village, and the officers and men of his Company tended the grave beautifully and made a cross with his name, rank, and date of death inscribed. The last I saw were some flowers laid on the grave in a peaceful corner of a field near a wall. Donald

was loved by all. He held our respect and affection. His loss has made a great gap in our ranks. Men like him are rare and we can ill afford their loss. . . . I speak from my heart when I say that a spirit of the quality of Donald's cannot be conquered by death. May you find comfort and pride too in a death which was Donald's price to rid the world of dark and destroying forces."

Corporal J. Bowery—4th Welch Rgt.—“I will always remember the first day your brother came to the Platoon. He gathered us all together in a room . . . to introduce himself. He seemed a little uneasy for he said, ‘I hope you fellows don't mind me coming to your Platoon for it's none of my doing.’ He had the idea that we didn't like Canadians but we soon put him at ease. The relief which came to his face was worth seeing. Yes, he certainly was well liked by us.”

G. V. Ferguson—(Winnipeg Free Press)—“It's a tremendous thing for a young fellow, as I well know, to feel a part of something which in any degree is bigger than himself, and it breeds happiness which I know he had when he died.”

Lieut. J. K. Brown—4th Welch Rgt.—“. . . I would like to put on paper some measure of my regard for Don. Our friendship was not of the usual Army sort, born of sharing common danger and physical discomfort. It had developed long before we experienced the worst of such things.

“We shared a complete and utter disregard for money as such. We each felt the other misplaced in the infantry. I was amused at times by his lack of knowledge of such chaps as lumberjacks, trappers, etc., but marvelled at the speed with which he could get across to them. We both enjoyed a bit of revelry, and such occasions saw rapid transitions in our antics and conversation. Downright serious at times but ever ready for a good laugh at the humor that invariably sooner or later entered even the most profound discussions.

“Such was the friendship that began a year ago last April, when I was promoted to the Sgts' mess. A friendship not made richer or more poor by the war, but merely one that seemed to be ‘on the books,’ and destined to be of far too short a duration. Don's death brings to mind at once the worst and best of war. His service in the infantry represents the very best a man may do for his ideals, and for mankind, and his loss represents the worst, by its sheer waste of something so sincere, so noble, so fine. Don died for something very vital to him, and conducted himself throughout as faithfully as you might expect. He did a marvellous job with his men too over there,

and refused to sacrifice one ideal on matters involving them. He was thus, and justly so, loved by his men. For a subaltern to accomplish this in the Imperial Army and remain a favorite with his brother officers as well is most difficult, but Don managed it . . . I hope the realization of the high regard in which Don was held by all will soften the blow. In France he had absolutely no regard for his own safety, and thought only of the Platoon. He did his job so well he was not only the best friend I had, but the best officer I saw over there . . . those who continue the job until victory are strengthened in their resolve and draw added and much needed courage from having known such a Don. No monuments will ever be necessary to keep fresh the memory of such a grand guy. He made them all himself before he died of far more precious materials than mere rock and mortar and chiselled words.”

But try to remember that a good man can never die. You will see him many times. You will see him in the streets, you will see him in the houses, in all the places of the town. In the vineyards and orchards, in the rivers and clouds, in all the things here that make this a world to live in. You will feel him in all things that are here out of love and for love—all the things that are abundant, all the things that grow. The person of a man may leave—or be taken away—but the best part of a good man stays. It stays forever. Love is immortal and makes all things immortal . . .

“The Human Comedy.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

This eBook is a collection letters. Spelling varies widely in these writings and has been left as is to maintain historical accuracy.

Quoted text is assumed to belong to the correspondence immediately following.

[The end of *Some Letters and Other Writings of Donald Albert Duncan* by
Donald Albert Duncan]