

March 26, 1916

Dear Father, Mother, Joel, Ben, Sophie, and Emma,

Thanks for the parcel you sent. I received it yesterday. The socks and scarf were quite welcome - Emma's knitting is much improved! The biscuits and chocolate were a great addition to our normal mess of bully beef (canned corned beef) and biscuits. Of course I shared them around - all the boys said to pass on thanks.

In your next parcel could you send a couple more pairs of socks and undergarments? The mud and lice wreak havoc on everything. Don't get me started - the lice are enough to drive you out of your mind. They stay in the seams of your clothes, and nothing gets them off. Once our rotation in the front lines is over, we go to a station where we get our uniforms fumigated, and we get a bath. Even that doesn't kill all the lice. The mud is a nightmare. I've heard of some men drowning in it. In our trenches it is up to our ankles in a good spot - some places have several feet of mud. Many men have trench foot caused by the damp. Their feet swell up and lose feeling. One man in my platoon stuck a bayonet in his foot and couldn't feel it. Some turn gangrenous and need to be amputated.

I cannot tell you where we are dug in right now. The censors cross out everything that is compromising. So I cannot tell you where we are right now or write as much as I would like. All I can say is we haven't been on any major offensives yet. It is still quite cold here, although it is almost April. The boys in my platoon are all quite used to it, though, since they are all from Winnipeg. Some of the Brits aren't faring as well though. The Canadian boys are giving them a hard time about that. It doesn't help that the mud makes everything seem worse and colder than it is.

The constant noise! Jerry's shells (they have several types - we call some minnies, whiz-bangs, etc.) are constantly flying through the air. The shrapnel has killed over a dozen men in my platoon already. I hear that is actually not bad. Some companies are hit much harder. Usually the shells fall in No Mans Land (the area between our trenches and Jerry's trenches). The boys who have the job of looking after the communication cables are usually the ones hit by shells and shrapnel. Sometimes the shells explode right near our trenches. We all have gotten quite good at telling where a shell is coming from and how far away it is. We are now very good at ducking - when we hear a shell close to us, that is. Many of the boys lose it from the constant shelling and noise and lack of sleep and stress. I must say, the noise does wear on your nerves. I am mostly used to it though. When I first heard the noise, it quite frightened me. All the gunshots and shells are enough to make any sane person shake in their shoes. I don't know if it is good or bad that it seems "normal" now. One other thing is I have perfected the art of cat-napping. Father will be glad that he's not the only one that can do that now. Don't laugh at me, Sophie. When you're tired enough, it is amazing how fast you can fall asleep.

Did I tell you Rob Larson is in my platoon? He sends his greetings. Also John Stevens and Billy Jacobs from down the street. When we're not busy with our duties and actually have time to relax and visit we're a merry bunch. (At least as much as we can be under the circumstances.) Harry Johnson got a stray bullet in his knee which shattered several bones. He was much envied by the rest

of the boys - the wound was bad enough that he got a "blighty." (A "blighty" is slang around here for a wound that is bad enough to get you out of the trenches but not fatal.) Frank Allen stuck his head over the parapet and caught a sniper's bullet. Otherwise our gang is in fine condition.

Does Jeanie still sleep with Emma? Do you have any of her kittens left? How is Prince doing? Has he treed any cats lately?

Love to all,

Private Charles Hamilton
27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion