RAYMOND

by Jean Paul Farley

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all those who helped me in the writing of this memoire.

First, of course, my father who patiently relived those memories of so long ago and told me about his adventure. My brother-in-law Norm Smith, who supplied the journal of the 23rd Field Ambulance that my father belonged to and other documents that helped me greatly. My sister Nicole Farley, who read the French text and made very helpful suggestions that much improved it. My good friend Tony Gibbs, who proofread the English version.

I would be remiss if I didn't also thank all of those, friends and family, who encouraged me to persevere through this lengthy project.

Preface

As children, or even adolescents, my father rarely spoke to us of his experiences in the army during the Second World War and when he did it was only in short and brief sentences. I assumed then, as many did I suppose, that he simply did not want to relive painful memories. So as the years went by, out of filial respect, I avoided the subject with him.

My father, even though too young, volunteered in the army and ended up serving as a stretcher bearer. He was part the Allied invasion of Normandy, and then participated in the French campaign, for which he received the *French Legion of Honour* in 2015. He also was involved with the liberation of Belgium and Holland and ended up in Germany in May of 1945. But, as I said, he spoke of this rarely and briefly.

In 2014, after the 70th anniversary of the D-Day, there was renewed interest for anything that touched the subject and while we were discussing the matter, someone asked if we had kept my father's correspondence with his family during his service; apparently, no one had thought it worth keeping, and the letters disappeared over the years.

At the same time, I noticed that my cousins and in-laws, who had just discovered an interest in the matter because of all the media attention, were asking my father questions about his experience in the army during the Second World War and that he willingly answered. Just then I thought of something and wondered...

I spoke with my father and suggested that I write about his experience as a stretcher bearer in the Canadian Army's Medical Corp's 23rd Ambulance based on conversations we would have. To my surprise he accepted. Here is that account.

The Reverend Sister Mary of the Immaculate Conception of the Third Rock Where Jesus Set His Foot

I'll be thirteen in October this year. We're lucky, this September turned out nice, it's as if summer wanted to linger on for a bit. And luckier still that the Member of Parliament for the county, Mr. Gourd, found a job for dad; he works on repairing the roads in the area. That way mom could buy shoes for those of us who are old enough to go to school. I missed out on a good part of last year because I was too sick so, I'm still in the third grade.

But this year isn't starting so well. We haven't been in school one week that Sister Jeanne-Marie, or Big Dan as all the kids call her, cornered my sister Carmen to give her a note for dad about me; I suppose she just doesn't like me. As I said, it's not starting so well.

But also this year, I heard on the radio in the kitchen that there is a lot of talk about Germany, and on the second Monday of September they announced that we were at war. I wish I could join the Army but it will be five years before I'm 18, and they say the war will be finished by Christmas; too bad.

Fall surprised us this year, it arrived like an ambush, and although the days in class with Big Dan seem to go on endlessly, all of a sudden it's December and winter has started. Not officially of course, but it's starting to be really cold and there's already a lot of snow on the ground. I was reading in *Le Droit* just a few days ago that the first Canadian troops just left for England. I was telling Mom that I thought they were very lucky; she looked very upset and answered, "Don't ever say that!" Well fine, I won't say it anymore if it makes her so cross, but I still think those guys are lucky.

Cette école, construite en 1905, s'écroula sous le pic des démolisseurs en avril-mai 1952.

The school in Casselman built in 1905, demolished in April-May 1952.

Mom's sister, *ma tante Evelyne* and her husband, uncle Jim, sometimes come to visit from the States, and I always look forward to hear my uncle's stories about his adventures as a soldier during the Great War. He's the only of all of my uncles who fought in the war and he's a real hero in my eyes.

I remember one story in particular where he told us that when he put his ear to the ground in England, he could hear the soldiers march in France, on the other side of the Channel. We were all very impressed, at least I was! But over the years now I think uncle Jim made up some pretty tall tales.

It's even colder today than yesterday. I don't think the 39-40 winter will ever finish. We're in March and enough snow fell this week that you'd think it was still February. A good thing mom could buy us good winter coats and that we live in the village of Casselman, also that we live close to the school. But the coats and the proximity to the school haven't helped much this year; having Big Dan as a teacher really doesn't help things. She put me way in the back of the class and I just can't read what she writes on blackboard. On top of that, according to her, nothing I do is good enough.

Two weeks ago that whole story about the airplane really didn't go over well with her. This plane came out of nowhere in the sky and passed

very low over the entire village; all the kids stopped listening to the teacher and gawked through the window at the flying engine. We were all captivated; just think, a plane over the village; no one had ever seen such a thing! But Big Dan sent me, just me, to see the Mother Principal because I kept looking out the window. When I told the principal why the teacher had sent me she just told me to sit there and watch as the plane might fly over the village once more. It never did come back. Big Dan asked me after recess what the principal had said, and as I told her. Her eyes became really round and her face became so red I thought she was choking. But no, she breathed again, and walked away as fast as she could.

Again! She just caught Carmen, who was running out of the school with her friend Yolande Racine, a friend who lives at the corner of *rue de la Prison*. The good sister was in such a hurry that she didn't even put her boots on. She slipped and fell, nearly killing Carmen as she collapsed on top of her.

You guessed it, another note for dad about me. I really did ask for it this time though. Still, if she's that keen for me to listen to her she shouldn't have put in the last bench at the back of the class and I still can't read whatever she scribbles on the board. And also, whatever she was reading from that history book was so boring!

Often, she would ask us to practice making divisions in the arithmetic class. When we finished, if we had an answer, she asked us to line up against the wall so she could ask us to tell the class our results. Since I was good at that, I was usually the first in line and she wouldn't even look at me, let alone ask me for my answer.

After a while, I just got tired of this and didn't line up. Then, wouldn't you know it, I was the first one she asked:

- *Raymond, did you find the solution to the problem?*
- *I didn't do the division, I answered dryly.*
- *And why not? She asked, quite happy deep down.*
- *Cause I didn't feel like it.*

You guessed it, another note for dad.

Since the holidays this is the third note the sister has given Carmen about me for dad. But this time she seemed even more upset than she usually was. I suppose I should have been listening to her, but the book I was reading about *Capitaine Vaillancourt* was so much more interesting than

that Jacques Cartier she was reading about. But still, dad really wasn't happy.

I didn't go with dad when he went to see the sister, but it was for the best because he wasn't in a good mood when he came back home. He was so upset in fact that he gave me the worst spanking I ever got in my entire life. I sure didn't stick around either, but at night, when I was bed, I heard my mother tell him he overdid it and that perhaps he should ask for advice from the parish priest. A few days later, when he came back from visiting *monsieur le curé*, he told mom that from now on she would be charge of the discipline at home. I really would have liked to be a mouse in the wall of the parsonage to hear that conversation.

Spring 1940

A little after that whole story, it must have been a Saturday, my little sister had the cat on her knees and was playing with her. As the cat jumped down, it put out its shoulder of one of its front paws. I high-tailed it out of the kitchen, thinking dad would ask me to put the animal out of its misery, but I wasn't fast enough, or discreet enough. Dad asked me to set the shoulder back in place. I had no idea how to go about that, but I certainly wasn't going to question the man after all the trouble I had been causing lately. I delicately took the cat, it didn't fuss too much, and gently manipulating its shoulder, I set it in place. Boy, was I astonished at what I had done! I was also surprised the cat didn't put up a fight, but by all accounts less surprised than *mon oncle Albert*, who was visiting. Looking at me from the chair he was sitting on in the corner of the room, his eyes open wider than dollar coins. I often wondered how dad had known I could set that cat's shoulder.

Work on the Farm

Spring is passing, we are nearly in summer and the steady flow of Big Dan's notes to my parents hasn't let up much, so dad decided I had better go work on *mon oncle Alcide's* farm to help with the chores. He hurt his back in the winter and his children are still too young to be of much help. He really can't pay me much, but it is better than having to deal with Big Dan day-in, day-out.

I feel a bit like a bull in a china shop though. It's been a long while since the family left the farm dad owned and even then, being only five years old when we moved to the village, I was way too young to have

learned much about farming. My uncle has to explain just about every chore he asks me to do.

About a week after I got here he told me to saddle-up the mare that is usually quite tame. That time though she didn't want to budge, and pinned me against the wall of her stall. After a while, wondering why I wasn't back with the mare, my uncle came to check on me and saw that the horse just wasn't cooperating. He didn't look very happy at all and told me to get out of the way and started to put the bit on her. She pinned him against the wall too. Then he could see very well it wasn't my fault, but he got very angry; he went to get a chain and struck the mare a few times. After that there were no more problems and the horse realized it was time to work.

Also, *mon oncle Alcide* doesn't seem to understand that my eyesight is really poor. I was helping him plow a field to get it ready for seeding and he stuck a spade at the other end of the field and told me guide myself by the handle of the tool. Well, as if I could see the spindly little handle all the way across the field! And, when I told him so he looked at me very surprised and was lost for words. Finally he asked if I could see the fence post near the spade he had planted; yes, I could see that, not very clearly, but I could guide myself on the post.

A bit later, sending me to do chores one morning, he asked me to be back home for lunch at noon. Since I didn't have a watch he told me he'd open the barn door when it was time. The barn door at the other end of field! I could just about see there was a barn, but not if the door was open or shut. So it was coming on two o'clock in the afternoon when I got back for lunch. *Ma tante Rose,* his wife, was none too happy; she had finished washing the dishes and was in the middle of ironing. She already didn't seem very happy to have me underfoot as it was…

Summer is passing and I don't find that I'm getting much better with farm work; *mon oncle Alcide* still has to explain just about everything he asks me to do. It's true that I was born on a farm, but as I said my family left when I was too young to have learned much. Just last week my uncle asked me to get the wagon to pick up the hay and that's just what I did. I never thought to bring pitch forks. Even after three months helping on my uncle's farm, I still feel I haven't learned much. I'm so frustrated.

The other morning, after I was done milking the cows before breakfast, *ma tante Rose* criticized me for having taken longer than their front neighbour, *mon oncle Armand*. I know full well that my aunt is not very happy to have me living with them and I realize *mon oncle Alcide* is also not always happy with me, even when I try my best to do as I'm asked. I also

know that I'm not a fast worker, that my eyesight isn't good and that I'm not handy. I also know my aunt is happy to tell it to anyone who will listen, but with more time I could learn to work better.

A little after that, she was upset at me because the butter I brought her from the dairy cooler was too soft. We were in the middle of July, for Pete's sake! Maybe I shouldn't have, but I just couldn't help myself from replying:

- *Well, ma tante Rose, it's hot outside and I'm not a refrigerator.*
- *Listen, Raymond, she retorted, if you can't get along with us, maybe it's time you looked for a job elsewhere.*

I really don't want to bother dad with my sad stories again, but summer is almost over and the hay is all in. I wonder if he couldn't talk to his boss at the Canadian Hardwood Company about a job for me. It might pay more than what *mon oncle Alcide* can pay me and I would live at home again.

Canadian Hardwood Company (fall 1940 – spring 1941)

Employés de Canadian Hardwoods le 2 octobre 1940

Dans la 1ère rangée: Arthur Gravelle, Philias Lavergne, Paul Groulx, Rhéal Farley, Richard Gravelle, Rolland Deguire, Maurice Deguire, Henri Landry, René Ladouceur et Emilien Racine. 2e rangée: Alphonse Deguire (debout), Isaïe Rainville, Hector Boyer, Rémi Laplante, Gérald Lafrèche, Gérard Farley, Gaston Poirier, William Farley, Roméo Laplante, Fernand Farley, Léo Groulx et Gérard Goulet. Dernière rangée: Albert Gravelle, Arthur Laplante, Ferdinand Bray, Gérard Longtin, Omer Durivage, Thomas Desjardins, Jean Gratton, Josephat Gravelle, Donat Bray, Rosaire Rainville, Philippe Rainville, Jean-Paul Quenneville, Richard Marleau, Honoré Saint-Louis et Moïse Leroux.

Dad, as well as my brothers Gérard, Fernand and Rhéal already work at the Canadian Hardwood and he did talk his boss into hiring me to make chair spindles. I've been working here for a couple of months and I like it.

Some say the wages could be better, but it is better than what my uncle could afford to give me.

A few weeks ago, Mr. D'Aoûst and his brother were over to see dad about a job as sawyer for them; they assure him they will give him better wages. After considering it for a while, dad would like to accept their offer, but the boss at the Canadian Hardwood, Mr. Carr won't let him go. On Saturday, just before closing, he explained to my father that the company has a government contract linked to the war effort and that because of that he can keep his employees from quitting. Dad answered that in that case he should pay his employees what the government contract stipulates. They didn't agree.

On Sunday, dad spoke about this with his friend Hector Pilon and they both decided they would go to the Unemployment Insurance Office in Ottawa to find out just what the rules are. So, Monday morning just as they were getting ready to take the train for Ottawa, Mr. Leroux, the manager at the Canadian Hardwood came on behalf of Mr. Carr to ask my father what wages he would consider to remain with the company. Dad explained that at this point it wasn't a question of money but rather the principle of the matter. So Mr. Pilon and Dad boarded the train for Ottawa to consult with the Unemployment Insurance Office. They came back that evening with a lot of information.

According to the employee they spoke with, yes, the company could keep its employees from leaving, if their duties were involved with a war effort government contract, but in that case, these employees had to be paid the wages outlined in that contract. It's fair to say that Mr. Carr was not happy with that information.

His hands tied, Mr. Carr had to pay some of his employees better wages and had to let my father go since his job didn't involve work on one of those contracts. Actually, by now, it was better for dad to accept Mr. D'Aoûst's offer. Not long after that, Mr. Leroux came to see me to tell me that my services were no longer needed since the contract on chair spindles had been cancelled. It seemed too convenient considering it was so soon after Dad had left, but what could I do?

All the while, Mr. Carr sent the clerk in charge of salaries, Mr. Gravelle, to burn all the records relating the company wages in the furnace of the boiler. The man had to stay there until he was sure all the papers were reduced to ashes. After that episode, no one by the name of Farley was welcome to work in that company.

As for dad, he worked as a sawyer in the D'Aoûst brothers' company until the winter, but in December they wanted to send him to work in one of

their camps as a lumberjack. In the end he might have been better not to have gone to the Unemployment Insurance Office and take that raise Mr. Carr had offered before he left for Ottawa.

As for me, I found a job as a stoker in one of the linen factories the government is advocating for the war effort. But summer is passing and I decided to work as a farm hand again. After all, I had learned a bit working for *mon oncle Alcide*, even if I wasn't fond of the work.

After Prime Minister McKenzie-King's plebiscite (Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription), my brothers Laurent and Fernand were conscripted: Laurent in the Airforce and Fernand in the Army. As for Gérard, he didn't pass the physical exam: flat feet, nearly blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. I would have liked to join Laurent and Fernand, but I'm not even close to being 18 and I can't convincingly change the registration card I just got.

Ottawa – Summer 1942

It turns out, I don't think I'm cut out for farm work at all. I didn't last very long on Mr. Dupuis' farm and I decided to go register at the Unemployment Office in Ottawa. Maybe I could get a job in the city.

I took the early morning train at the Casselman Station and got into Ottawa that very morning. Having followed dad's directions II found the Unemployment Office on Sparks Street, not far from the Union Station. On the board I noted that the Ottawa Hunt and Golf Club was looking for a waiter. To get there I had to take the streetcar down Bank Street all the way to the bridge at Lansdowne Park, cross the bridge that spans the canal and take a bus all the way to the golf club; nearly as long as the trip to Ottawa, but I got the job. The salary is one dollar a day, plus we get a room in the dorms at the club!

I serve the drinks in the bar downstairs, but sometimes I replace the barman in the main dining room upstairs. I don't think it's entirely legal since I'm not 21 yet, far from it, but I don't ask questions. I'll also have to improve my English; the other day I served this guy a quart instead of pint: in French a "pinte" is a quart in English, so I got mixed up. The guy didn't seem to mind though.

All over the streets in Ottawa we can see posters for Army recruits, it's really a shame I'm too young to join; two years to go yet! In the meantime, I have my job as a waiter. But after two months of that I decided to try

my luck at the Army Recruitment Office. At worst they'll just tell me to come back when I'm old enough. I really have nothing to lose.

Canadian Army recruitment poster

So on a clear July morning of 1942, I took the bus up Bank Street, crossed the bridge to the Lansdowne Park streetcar terminal and got myself to town. At first everything went swell at the recruitment office. There were no problems with the tests and the physical exam, until I got the eye exam; the doctor looked rather perplexed that I could read almost nothing on his board - just about legally blind, he told me. After that the corporal asked for my registration card and saw very well that I was 16, not 18 as the minimum age is (in fact I am nearly 17). He told me to come back in a year and a half. That'll be a long wait!

Well, fall is well on its way, we're nearly in mid-October and it's been a couple of months since my failure at the recruitment office, and I feel that if I went back now, maybe I would fare better. The job as a waiter isn't bad, but I'd much rather be in the Army. Also, I don't think this job will last much longer; I can't imagine clients will want to play golf in the dead of winter, so off I go again.

This time it worked! The corporal never asked to see my registration card; I just said I was born in 1923, so I was 19, and wouldn't you know it, he believed me or at least he seemed to believe me, and that's what counts. So I'm now Private Raymond Farley!

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October 29, 1942
Lansdowne Park
Ottawa, Ontario

Hi Rhéal,

You probably already know this, but I managed to join the army a couple of weeks ago. I don't know which corps I'll be assigned to yet, but when I joined (the first time and also the second) the corporals I spoke to told me I will be able to chose when the time comes. On my first try, over two months ago, I said my preference was to serve in the Service Corps as a mechanic, although I don't really know much about it. But this time I indicated I wanted to be in Medical Corps: whatever happens, we'll see. The starting salary is $1.40 a day.

I probably told you too many times already that the army life was what I wanted, but I have to say that for a country guy like me, it's a bit of a shock. After the medical exam and all the other tests at the recruitment office on Slater Street, the corporal didn't seem to be very happy about my poor eyesight so he sent me to see the specialist who also found I had poor eyesight, but he didn't reject me. So, the corporal had to send me to Integration Centre at Lansdowne Park, at the other end of Bank Street, on the second floor of the skating rink, beside the stadium.

That's where I got my kit. All that a soldier could ever need: a uniform - of course, underwear, socks, shoes, wax and a brush to polish them, a tooth brush, a razor, a badger shave brush, a mess tin and utensils, webbing and Blanco to clean it, a great coat, gloves, mittens, a ground-tarp, a gas-mask, kit bag, two knapsacks, a harness to carry all that stuff. But I'm sure I'm forgetting a lot.

The least anyone can say is that the Army life is different from living at home. The house we live in with mom and dad was sometimes a bit too cozy, but life here is a horse of another colour. When I saw the barracks, I was, well, surprised. One big room with at least two hundred bunk-beds and no separation between them; four hundred guys will snore together here. But at least I was lucky and got a top bunk.

And the morning now… the alarm clock is a guy playing the bagpipes to wake the dead. No one lingers in bed long with that noise; some guys really get upset and swear at him with words their mothers would blush to hear; well at least I'm sure mom would have give them her two-cents worth

about it. Anyway, we get up and make our bed with the sheets so tight the corporal has to be able to bounce a quarter on it and everything else has to be ship-shape.

Soldiers in front the building that served as barracks for the new recruits at Lansdowne Park during the Second War.

But I have to say the hardest part for me is the lack of privacy. Our family is rather large, as you well know, and we're sometimes a bit on top of each other, but here it's a totally new definition of togetherness. The sinks to shave and brush our teeth: out in the open. The toilettes and showers: in the open also, no cubicles. It's all rather intimidating. It won't be easy but I'll have to get used to it. On the other hand, the food is not so bad and there is plenty of it.

After breakfast we're back to our bed, and then we're off to the parade grounds with our assigned section. That's about all we learn here: walk and walk again, and when we're fed up and our calves hurt, we walk some more. We're being taught to walk in cadence as a group and we're building endurance.

And, oh yes, we also have to learn how to salute the officers and not just any which way: with our right hand, open palm to the temple. We have to be fast learners about this since the officers are next to God, maybe a bit above him. Luckily there are very few here at the recruitment camp.

Also, I have to tell you. I met one of our cousins on the Mayer side of the family; I just can't remember his name. Anyway, he had nice wavy hair

he was very proud of. Like I said he 'had'; after the camp barber finished with him, all that was left was a short brush on top of head. He was so upset he was in tears. He didn't last long either. Like many others, he suddenly 'discovered' he wasn't eighteen yet and went back home. He'll have to come back when he's old enough and his number comes up and have his head nearly shaved again. But at least that time he'll know what to expect.

Well, we just learned that we have to be ready to leave in two days for the next step of our training: the Cornwall camp. We have to make room for the next batch of recruits. I'm looking forward to doing something else besides walking around between the skating rink and the stadium.

I'll be sure to send news from Cornwall.

Raymond.

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January 5, 1943
Cornwall, Ontario

Hi Rhéal,

I've been in Cornwall for a bit over two months now. We left Ottawa on the morning of the November 1st it was still warmish for the season. We all walked from our barracks at Lansdowne Park all the way to the New York Central station on Mann Avenue. I'm not sure how well you know Ottawa, but that's about two miles, a good walk with all of our kit on our back; the haversack on our shoulder and all the other bags and packs strapped to our harness. All that was starting to weigh us down by the time got to the station. Once there, we waited our turn to board the train, but that didn't take too long, although with all of our stuff with the weight of our baggage, it did seem longer.

Canadian soldiers with their kit ready to board a train taking them to their next mission.

This was a special train for the Army to transport the troops, so once we left the station we only stopped for water and coal along the way and not in any of the regular stations. We got to Cornwall by the end of the afternoon, just in time for supper.

In this training camp they put us in real barracks; a building in the form of an H. On each length are the dorms with enough bunk-beds for an entire company, roughly 100 men, and in the bar in the middle are the facili-

ties: sinks, showers and toilettes for the two companies. It's not luxurious, but it works, and at least here the toilettes are separated by partitions.

Most of the French guys were put on our side of barracks; I must say it makes adapting to army life a bit easier. Just as at the Recruitment Centre, it's best for us to follow the rules about keeping our stuff in order; the lieutenant comes for inspection rounds every morning except Sundays and things had better be ship-shape.

We got our weapon on the first morning: and old rifle from the Great War, with no striker and no ammunition. They're teaching us how to handle a weapon, but they're not fool enough to give us something that could actually fire a bullet. But still we have to handle it as if it were real: take it apart, clean it, and at night put it at the head of the bed. I suppose they want us to get use to the weight; it's really quite heavy. Our gun, "is our best friend" they keep telling us. We'll also probably learn how to handle a machine gun eventually. Anyway, at least here we're not just practicing how to parade; that's boring and frankly my calves were really getting sore.

The weeks have gone by and we're all starting to get used to being here. The sergeant was telling us about the leave we'll get for the holidays; half the guys will leave for Christmas and the other half for New Year's. It turns out our company was going to go in the second group, but a bunch of guys went to see the sergeant just before the first group left and told him Christmas was much more important for us. So, we all got to go that day, but too late for me to make it to the station on time for the train to Casselman. So I decided to hitchhike and got lucky; an OPP cruiser stopped and got me to Ottawa. From there I took the train and got home in time for Christmas. I would have stopped in Ottawa to see you, but you were probably at work and I would have risked missing the last train.

As planned, after Christmas I came back to Cornwall and just after New Year's we were told what corps we would be assigned to; I'm happy because I'm going to the Medical Corps. That's what I had requested when I joined. Well, the second time anyway.

It went rather well for me. After the morning parade we were separated into groups of about twenty men and waited our turn to go before a lieutenant, who had set up his desk at the canteen. That's where he told us where we would go. Since I was assigned to exactly the corps I had asked for there wasn't much to say. But others weren't so happy, one or two left with tears in their eyes and in other cases harsh words were said. Well, it is true that when we joined the corporals who interviewed us then were just about promising that we would be able to choose what we wanted, but in the

end we just have to go where we we're told; we just had to live with it. So, now we'll be boarding another train for another training camp.

I'll be sending more news when I have some.

Raymond

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March 7, 1943
Borden, Ontario

Hi Rhéal,

I got to Camp Borden, about 60 miles north of Toronto, on January 6th. Of course, it took us longer to get here than the to go between Ottawa and Cornwall and the train was just as comfortable, with wooden benches and not very well heated cars; it's cold that time of year and we were all glad to get off the train. The barracks are just about the same as those we had just left and they kept most of the French-Canadians together again.

I hope Rita is over the flu she got and she didn't miss too many days in school. I'm glad to hear that dad got a job to replace you at Individual Laundry with Mr. Thérrien; I'll bet he'll get better wages than at Kemp Edward. He'll learn the engineering trade, and who knows that might be better than being a sawyer.

All is well with me and the weather here is becoming milder, it won't be long now for spring to come.

Training here is going as expected. In my case, since I'm in the Medical Corp, there is no need to have a gun, let alone learning how to use it. But I have to learn how to immobilize a fractured limb, dress a wound, apply direct pressure or do a tourniquet. We're also learning how to orient ourselves with the stars at night, in case we get lost on a battlefield; hopefully there won't be too many overcast nights.

Aerial view of Camp Borden around 1943.

The routine here is just about the same as in Cornwall, but the courses are more interesting. The news from the outside, however, doesn't reach us as fast; it's as if it was stopped at the gate. Not long after we got here, we heard about what happened at the battle of Dieppe in August. Some were saying it was a major military defeat, but the sergeant assured us it was just a practice for the real landing that will take place later. Whatever it was, it is a shame for all the guys who died, were wounded, or for those who were taken prisoner, all for the sake of a 'practice'.

Mom probably told you about my visit; before we left for England we were given leave from the 20th to 26th of February so we could visit with our family one last time. I was glad to see everyone who is still at home, especially since I don't know when I'll see them again.

But before we went on leave, we all had to sign a sworn statement that we would return for the trip across the Atlantic. Since the guys with me are all volunteers, they knew full well we would be leaving and were expecting it, so most came back. It's a different story for the conscripts; up to now they can stay and serve in Canada, at least for now. Anyway, those few who did not return this time around had better hide well because if the military police find them, it won't be a happy reunion.

We have to be ready to leave tomorrow morning, and I'm not sure when we'll get to England.

Well, that's about all for now. Tell everyone in the family I'll write when I can, but I just don't know when that will be.

Tell them all to take care,

Raymond

P.S. Just before we left Camp Borden, the commanding officers warned us that from now our letters couldn't mention where we will be, or how many, or the camp conditions, in fact we can't write about much except how the weather is and how we are feeling. So you see, my letters will be rather short, but I'm still looking forward to hearing from you.

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Because of the warning we got on leaving Camp Borden I wasn't able to write in my following letter all of the details about the crossing and our arrival in Glasgow.

Departure for Europe

Just before we were due to leave Camp Borden, I met a sergeant who told me I didn't have to leave for England; he knew I was too young to join and that I was still too young even now. He added that he could fix it that instead of going to Europe I could just go home. I answered him that it was very nice of him to offer, but that I wanted to go to Europe, in fact that's why I joined. Although I didn't tell him, I remembered just how I felt more than three years earlier in mom's kitchen when reading that article in *Le Droit* where the journalist was reporting on the troops leaving for Europe, and still now I thought they were lucky. The sergeant looked a bit surprised by my answer but he let it go and that conversation was as if it never happened.

So, a few days later we all boarded the train leaving Borden, on March 8th, and like the two times before that we had to have all of kit with us, and the train was just as comfortable: those nice wooden benches again. Slowly the big steam locomotive got under way and the cars rolled down the tracks out of the station. Gradually, we sped up on our way towards the border with the United States to eventually reach New York City.

At first the guys were rather pleased to be finally leaving for this adventure, but after a few hours, about when we reached the border at Niagara Falls, many were dozing as best they could either resting against their packs or on the wall of the car. The train must have stopped along the way for water and coal and also to change locomotives at Albany (New York State's

capital), but other than that, we didn't stop at any of the many stations along the way.

Finally, the following morning we reached the outskirts of New York City: I'd never seen such a huge city! But even if any of us had had a yearning to visit we couldn't have. Also, I'm sure that tired and sore as we were, none of us thought much about sightseeing.

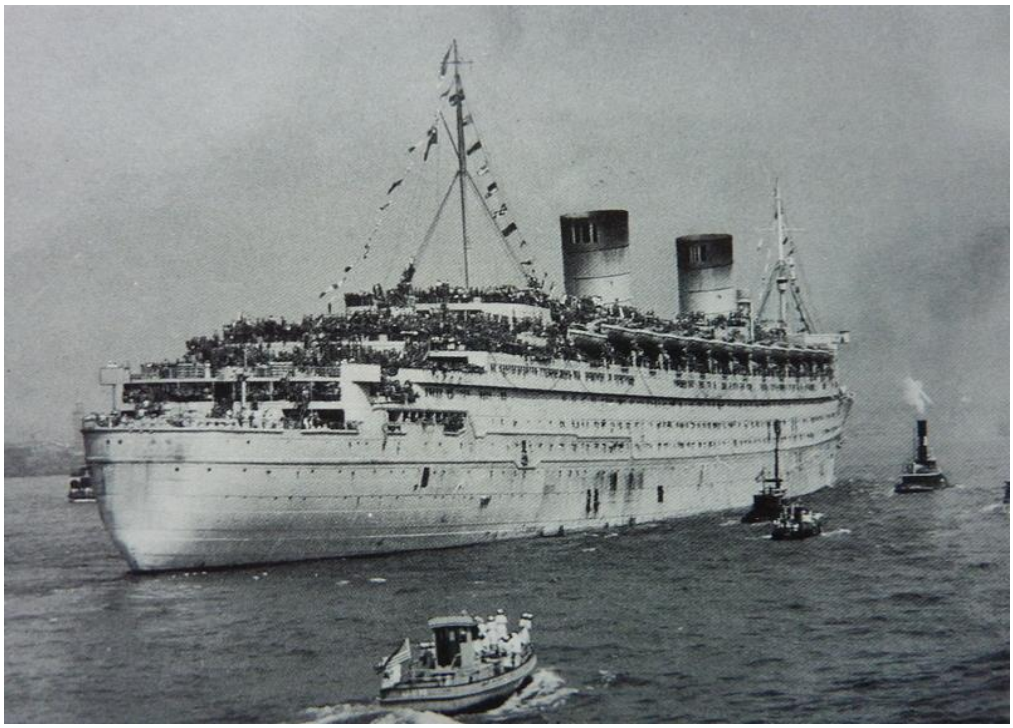
The train finally came to a stop right at the docks in New York harbour. Once we got off the train we got in one of the shuttles that ferried us to the Queen Elizabeth anchored in the basin of the harbour. I think we must have been more than ten thousand men on that ship, and we were much more jam-packed than in the barracks. The ship was built to accommodate 2,500 passengers comfortably, that's saying just how crowded we were.

Of course, there must have been officers travelling with us, but I have no idea where they were. The highest ranking guy I remember seeing of the entire crossing was a sergeant. Although it's true the ship was so big I'm sure there are plenty of places I never saw.

Even though we were all very excited by the adventure of boarding, we did finally go to bed and most of us fell asleep. In the wee hours of morning, the Queen Elizabeth weighed anchor and slid silently towards the open sea, leaving behind the New York skyline darkened by the curfew in effect all over the eastern coast of America. The only ones who saw the shadows slowly vanish below the horizon were the watchmen and the crew in the captain's bridge manning the ship. When we woke up the following morning we were at sea. Even on the biggest ship in the world and with over ten thousand guys about me, I felt very little looking out at the open vastness around us.

A few hours after we boarded, they asked for men to operate the anti-aircraft batteries installed on the ship. I volunteered since with responsibilities came the privilege of cutting in front of lines we had to form to access just about every service, like the canteen for example. But luckily, we never had to use the batteries; in fact, we never saw a single plane hear during the entire crossing.

The sleeping accommodations on board were different from Cornwall or Borden. The beds were smaller and we were twelve per cabin, at least in my cabin, but there was a toilette. We were rather cramped. And, there were only two meals a day: the first in the morning, and the second started late in the afternoon. Those who ate earlier in the morning were the first to come back for supper; the last ones had their meal just before going to bed at night. I don't know when the guys who worked in the kitchen slept, maybe there were two shifts.



The Queen Elizabeth anchored in New York harbor with a load of soldiers ready to leave for Europe.

I also noted that many of the guys didn't have sea legs, and they were sick as dogs, the rest of us became nauseous just looking at them! The ship's rolling on the waves made them sick, their faces became a greyish green, they threw up all of their stomach's content and even when it was empty they kept trying to vomit, the poor devils. But what's even worse for them is that the crossing that usually took four days lasted eight because the ship had to zig-zag across the ocean to avoid the German U-Boats; the captain even had to come back towards America for a bit.

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April 30, 1943
(Aldershot)

Hi everyone,

I made to England safe and sound. It's already spring here, although by now there mustn't be a lot of snow left around Casselman either. But I have to tell you it's really different here; it's like I landed on the other side of the world and it took forever to get here. I'm looking forward to getting your letters with news from home.

We finally got in the port of Greenock in Glasgow, but just like we left New York, we never noticed because we anchored in the middle of the night on March 17th. When we woke up we saw the city with all those chimneys; I actually wondered why there are so many all over the roofs. The weather was fine though, not too cold for the middle of March. But as I say, it sure is different.

Just as in New York the ship was in the middle of the harbour and we had to take shuttles to get to the dock. It took quite a while to get all the guys to the pier, and once there, we climbed in the back of trucks that took us to the station where we boarded the train that was waiting for us. On the way to the station, again, I was fascinated by all those chimneys, it was like a forest!

Well, that's about all I can write for now: I'm in England and I'm well. Don't forget to write when you can.

I hope this letter will get to you; German U-Boats try to sink as many ships they can and when they go down so does the mail on board.

Oh yes, before I finish, I have tell you how you should address your letters when you write: on the envelope you have to write my name, my regimental number (C101596) and RCAMC (for Royal Canadian Army Medical Corp). That way the Army's mail service will now where to send the letter no matter where I am.

Raymond

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If I could, I would have written many other details, but because of the censorship that's about all I could put down on paper.

Some guys were very disappointed when we reached our destination because as they got off the ship many of the non-commissioned officers, like

corporals and sergeants, promoted in Canada were demoted to simple-soldiers. I noticed one in particular, a guy whose last name was Soucis I had met at Camp Borden was rather upset the last time I saw him.

And the trains, boy are they different! The cars are divided in compartments aligned along a narrow corridor and there can be six to eight people in each. You can exit from the corridor, or if the platform is on that side, there is door in the compartment also. But just as in Canadian trains the seats are wooden. The train whistle is different also, it's a higher pitch and much shriller.

It took just about as long to reach our destination as it took to get from Borden to New York City because we crossed the country through all of its length to reach Aldershot, a distance south of London. I'm not sure why the ship could not dock closer to our destination, like at Southampton or the military port of Portsmouth, but I'm not in charge here.

Once we got to the Aldershot station we all got off the train and climbed on the back of waiting trucks and we finally reached the military camp on the outskirts of the city. Obviously this camp has been here for a while and barracks are two stories high and built with bricks rather than wooden like those in Cornwall and Borden. Oh, and I finally solved that mystery about the chimneys: because there's no central heating in the houses, there is a stove in just about every room.

The barracks aren't built in that H shape here; they're rectangular and all the rooms give out either of a veranda on the first floor or a balcony on the second. To get to the toilette, at the end of the building you have to go outside. I sure hope the winters here aren't as cold as those back home or it's not going to be very pleasant going to the bathroom in the middle of night.

Members of the Reconnaissance Brigade posing in front of military barracks in Aldershot.

The barracks of the Aldershot military camp build around the parade grounds.

When we got here they had apparently just finished an important military exercise: Operation Spartan. The guys who spoke to us about it were telling us that the command wanted to make this as realistic as possible and that they were using live ammunition: a far cry from the old Great War guns with no strikers and no bullets we were given in Cornwall. When they came

back the men were so tired they were given a special permission to stay in bed until noon. Obviously, we won't be bored here.

The daily routine here is also a bit different. When we wake up, we make our bed conscientiously, as always, then we go the mess hall for breakfast. Then it's the parade and exercises. In my case, I'm part of those who take first-aid courses. On the first day the corporal sent me to help at the section where they made dog tags. But the following day he sent me to the officers' mess kitchen. For the first week I washed the pots and pans, then they asked to wash the floors, and after that I was in charge of the hot-water boiler for the kitchen and the showers; it's needed for the food as well as washing the mess-tins and the pots. After my night's shift I usually go to bed but sometimes I visit the local village before sleeping.

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June 15, 1943
(Colwood House, Bolney)

Hi mom and all the family,

Everything is going well here, I'm well and the weather is fine this spring.

I've moved since I last wrote to you. Here we are housed in tents, like big teepees big enough for six guys. In the evenings I sometimes go the theatre in the nearby village, either to see a movie or to see a show (in English of course, you can't expect to see French movies in England). Sometimes also the command organizes shows where there are sing-along's.

I hope everyone at home is well and that the younger children don't cause too much trouble for mom. Don't forget to write when you have a moment.

Raymond

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In the middle of June, I was told that this stage of my training at Aldershot was over and that I was leaving. In fact most of guys who got here with me were deployed somewhere else. So, I took the train with another guy to get here at Colwood House near the village of Botley. That's a lot of travel for a little guy from Casselman.

The first night I spent in a manor that must have been some lord's house before it was requisitioned by the Army. The soldiers were assigned to rooms that must have been the servants' quarters. But the following day I was sent to my regular quarters, with other soldiers of the A Company of the 23rd Field Ambulance, 3rd Division. By all accounts, that will be who I'm with from now on. It's very different from the barracks where we were stationed until now, but there are fewer men in each tent than in the wooden buildings of the camps at Borden or Cornwall or even the brick ones at Aldershot.

A few days after I got here, the headquarters organized a dance in the nearby village of Horsham for the men. I decided not to attend since I would have had to pay for whatever I drank and I just don't have the money to spend on that.

Also soon after I got here it was my turn to be assigned to the night shift to take care of camp's hot-water boiler. Just as at Aldershot we were in charge of making sure there was hot water for the men's showers and for the kitchen. The men also have to wash their mess tins after each meal and they are happy the water is warm enough. The shifts last one week and during that time those of us who are on that duty can go to bed rather than attend the parade.

But more important still, I was assigned my duty within the unit: I am now a stretcher bearer.

The commanding officer also organized two outings during the day, walking exercises during which we have to practice orienting ourselves to reading a map and prepare our food directly in our mess tin.

A couple days after that, one afternoon, we attended a drowning reanimation course. We lay the person on his stomach, remove any obstruction in his mouth and push on his back then raise him a little to empty his lungs of any fluid. It's not very complicated, but it could come in handy.

Just before the weekend we were reminded that only officers can wear a tie with their uniform, and that unit chiefs would be strict about that rule. I guess some of the soldiers tried to pass as officers when visiting the neighbouring villages.

Just at the end of the month we left the camp at around 11:30 p.m. to participate in Operation Smashex, an enemy territory night operations simulation exercise without a map. We had to guide ourselves by the stars and a compass. I must say if ever we have to do that we'll be like babes in the woods, especially since only the corporal has a compass.

When we finally got to sleep, we did so under the stars in the little wooded area we found. Again we prepared our food directly in our mess

tins and there were hardtacks, a sort of very hard biscuit we have to dunk in hot coffee or risk breaking a tooth biting into it. They're not too bad once they're soft. Anyway, the operation lasted three days and it was a change of routine.

Speaking of such: the daily schedule here is pretty much the same as at Aldershot, except as I said, the barracks are teepees rather than brick buildings. After the reveille at the sound of the bugle we make our beds, take our shower, shave, then it's breakfast. After that, inspection and parade, then we attend courses or go on a march. Unless of course the corporal decides to assign us to another task such as help in the kitchen, guard duty or anything else he can think of. Then, at noon, we have lunch, parade and so on.

Not long after that, the lunch parade ended just behind the manor where the officers are lodged; a musical band called the Rolling Stones gave a concert for the soldiers. Since there were no chairs we set ourselves on the grass, either sitting of lying down; I was lying down and must admit I dozed off for a bit, but it was a fine concert. I woke up as the crowd was applauding at the end.

The other day, some soldiers from the Service Corps showed up at the mess hall still in their overalls. They were told to go remove them and the following day we got an order that everyone should wear their uniform at the mess and on parades, no fatigues in those places.

Also, the command told us the day before last that the guards' discipline wasn't up to snuff. It seems some guys weren't saluting officers properly, or were leaning on something, some even sitting down while on duty. Of course, they should have been standing nearly at attention.

We were reminded also that in England we can't wear our summer drill uniform unless we're working and that those who are wearing them must change before attending parade.

Two days later we were told that unless the commanding officer was doing an inspection, at a ceremonial parade for example, or on guard duty we should wear our denims.

About two or three days after we got back from Operation Smashex, the commanding officer announced there would be a dance in the evening in the village of Bolney. I stayed at camp.

Around the middle of July, it was my first turn to be on duty for the Passive Air Defence (P.A.D.) squadron and I am also on nights guard duty. Guard duty is simple enough; we just stand at the gate and only allow authorized personnel and accredited visitors in the camp. We don't have weapons so any determined intruder would have ready access really. Fortu-

nately, nothing ever happens at night. As for the P.A.D. we just have to make sure the guys know where the air raid shelters are and that they obey the lights-out curfew; that too is rather simple.

We also learned there will be elections in Ontario and that Ontarian soldiers like me could vote if they fill out the necessary form. But I noted that the vote is not secret since we have to print our names and sign the form. I don't think I'll vote in that case, especially since I wouldn't have supported the incumbent Member of Provincial Parliament.

The commanding officer ordered us to wear our first field dressing at all times. We put it under the webbing on our helmet. Two or three days after, in the morning, we were sent to see a film on hand-to-hand combat (without weapons) and another film on how to find our way around unknown places. I suppose we didn't do so well in our exercise.

The following week, we were subjected to another marching exercise and on our noon break the lieutenant gave us a course on security. We ate sandwiches we had brought with us for lunch. I suppose they want us to get used to not eating regularly at the canteen.

It seems to me that the training is getting more specific. During the last week of July we had a course on how to use a gas mask, an exercise on how to set up a section dressing station and how to transport the wounded on a stretcher, and even on our backs. We were also taught how to give a sponge bath. That will practical since there wouldn't be bathing facilities in a field hospital and there would be no other way, especially with all those bandages. The following day the drivers of the different vehicles showed us how to water proof the motors in case they have to cross streams or small rivers.

On an altogether different subject, around the end of July the commanding officer ordered us to only use razor blades provided by the Army and not to buy any from the stores in the surrounding villages. The blades are rationed and the civilian population would run out if all the military started buying them as well.

I noticed also that the corporal often orders me to do tasks such as helping the in kitchen or the officers' mess; it doesn't bother me much, in fact, it's a change of routine.

Again around the end of July, we visited the installation in the military port of Portsmouth and we watched a film on how to recognize different types of aircraft. The day after, we had training on how to defend ourselves in case of gas attack and a week later on, how to decontaminate the wounded in case of just such an attack.

During the first few weeks of August I noticed a daily order that said that the punishment for not saluting an officer properly was too light; from now on those found in breach of the rule will be confined to quarters for at least seven days… I don't think it'll make much of a difference.

A little later we were told that those who were firing at wild game with army weapons will be charged by civil authorities and subsequently charged under the army act. It looks like some soldiers were shooting at animals in the area and that the local population wasn't too happy about that. Whatever happened, the incident was serious enough for the commanding officer to repeat the order ten days later.

I also have the definite impression that the local population isn't too happy with all those soldiers being around their villages. On the August 21st, we were told we absolutely needed a pass if we went five miles or more away from the camp and the following week that we could no longer go to the Ship Inn on Lewes Road in Brighton. I don't know what happened, but as I was saying, I don't think we're too welcome around here.

A few days later I got a seven-day leave pass; I was going to just stay in the camp but the corporal told me that if I did that, I would probably end up on some "volunteer" detail in the kitchen or in the officer's mess, or anywhere else. So, I left for Glasgow with a small group of other soldiers of the company.

It took us all day to reach our destination by train and we stayed at the Overseas Club, a sort of hostel for Canadian soldiers. The people who run it organize activities for us like card games, tours of the city, dances too (those I usually don't attend) and sometimes we are invited to spend an evening with a local family.

I noted a funny thing though, everywhere we went in Glasgow we never saw one officer or any others but Canadian soldiers. I say that it was funny because when I asked a police officer for directions, he told me I was headed towards the American soldiers club; but I never saw any such soldiers anywhere I went. Anyway, we all came back rested from the week's leave.

On September 3rd, we learned on the mess radio that the Allied landing in Sicily went well. According the latest report American, British and Canadian troops were making headways and the Italian resistance wasn't very strong. Of course, we would have liked to hear more news on the Canadian operation, but that's all we were told for now.

We also feel that training is intensifying. During the first week of September we went on a forced 20-mile march. Whatever else we're learning we're certainly getting used to sore feet without complaining too much.

Two days later we got orders to prepare for another move, this time our destination is Scotland. On September 13th, just after the morning parade, we had to empty the straw out of our *paillasses* (mattresses), turn them inside out and give them a thorough shaking out to ensure that no chaff or straw was left clinging to them. Then fold them neatly and place them in bundles of ten, securely tied and bring them to the Quarter Master Stores. Then we took down our tents, dried and folded them, counted the pickets and brought it all to the Quarter Master Stores. Then we took care of the tent floors and filled the drainage ditches.

Finally, two days later, the entire unit took the train or boarded trucks to travel from the south of the country all way to the north to a military base located near Castle Toward, by the Clyde River in Scotland. To get to the camp we had to climb out of the trucks, board one of landing craft tanks (L.C.T.) in order to cross the river, which is very wide there. Once near the beach we had to jump in the water that was waist deep and was very cold by the way.

The barracks here are wooden much like those in Cornwall. Oh, wow! Cornwall, it seems like forever since we left there. Anyway, it sure wasn't colder than here. We're quite a bit to the north and in September it's already well into autumn and that season is very humid here, but the commanding officer won't give us any wood to fire up the stoves in our barracks. It's not cold 'enough' apparently.

When we got here we were told to buy our cigarettes from Quarter Master Stores because we need coupons to get some from the Navy Army Air Force Institute (N.A.A.F.I.). We were also reminded that smoking in the mess hall and kitchen is forbidden.

The day after we got here, we went on a hike up a rather high hill near the camp; it was so high that when we reached the top we could see clouds below us. When we got back our clothes were damp, but since we (still) couldn't light the stoves in our barracks they remained that way during the entire evening during the show in the N.A.A.F.I. hall.

I suppose we weren't wet enough, because the following day we were handed our flotation device (we call them Mae Wests) to try them out in the Clyde river which wasn't any warmer than it had been two days before. Just in front of me was Marcel Major, who couldn't swim. We had to jump from the barge and follow the cables they had installed all the way to the dock, but Marcel must have thought his Mae West would allow him to walk on water. The more he was sinking the more he clung to the cable, until finally he panicked and hung on to me, making me sink with him. An officer, noticing the commotion, came over and asked if I needed help. I answered that

I was fine but Marcel there, needed assistance. Two days later we had another landing exercise, still with our Mae Wests but this time there was also artillery; the water was just as cold and afterward our barracks were still not heated.

Soldiers finishing a landing exercise.

A week later, at the end of the month, we had one more landing exercise. This time I was with my section in an Advanced Dressing Station (or A.D.S.) where we practiced receiving wounded soldiers.

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Boscombe, England
October 4, 1943

The end of September couldn't come soon enough for us. On the 30th we climbed in the trucks that brought us to the train station and from there we travelled all the way to the south of England; good riddance Scotland.

We got the Boscombe military camp, near Bournemouth, a small town in the south of the country, and we're happy that the weather is sunnier and warmer. Our clothes finally dried. We were billeted in different hotels in

the town and some guys were lodged with the local residents and some even in garages. It was also my turn again to be on duty for the P.A.D. squad. It wasn't long also before I was on guard duty at the Boscombe Bay Hotel where the lieutenant-colonel established his headquarters.

Near the middle of the month, a soldier I don't know was sentenced to six months in prison by the military tribunal for fighting with a sergeant and a corporal. I don't know what possessed him really; the officers that we deal with are usually nice guys and are easily approachable for advice. Maybe those he met weren't that nice, or maybe he was just in a bad mood.

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The weather lately in the south of England reminds me very much of what I'm used to around Casselman at this time of year and I was very happy to get news from home.

So, Rhéal joined the Air Force, that's quite some news! Last I had heard he was working in Ottawa.

The number of children still living at home is diminishing since Carmen left to join Berthe who now works at the laundry facilities of Saint Vincent Hospital. Berthe left a job as a maid with the Farley family (no relations to us, apparently). The pay must be better at the hospital and I'll bet Berthe is happy to get her Saturday afternoons and Sundays off. It's also convenient that Berthe and Carmen can live in the hospital dorms.

The house in Casselman must be quieter now.

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The Victory Bonds are on sale as of October 14th and have a yield of three per cent. I bought ten dollars worth; it's always good to have a bit of money set aside, you never know, it could come in handy.

Ever since we came back from the landing exercise in Scotland we keep hearing about Operation Pirate that should be held on the last week of October in preparation for combat against the Germans. But in the end the entire operation was cancelled because of inclement weather. Now that's rare! I'd say Lieutenant-Colonel Loree does it on purpose to send us in the rain, but just as well he decided against it this time. Even though the exercise was cancelled, we were still sent for a long walk in the rain.

The day after, Captain Hall, an Assistant Deputy Judge Advocate (A.D.J.A.) came to speak to us about the military tribunal procedures.

Around the beginning of November, the command announced there will be elective Saint John's Ambulance courses. I'm sure it will be useful for the rest of the soldiers, but the guys who are part of the Medical Corps must have better things to do. Everything being taught in that course we know or we should know by now.

We were also reminded that leave is a privilege and that we are on duty 24 hours a day. On the other hand, we are allowed 48 hours leave once a month, or under special circumstances.

Well, we're moving again. Since we came back from Scotland we weren't housed in barracks but rather billeted here and there, in one village or another, but we still have to report for duties, of course. Every day there are parades, exercises, marches, practical courses and lectures. Yesterday we watched two instruction films: one on traps Germans are likely to leave behind when retreating (when we finally get to fight them) and another on vehicle maintenance.

During the last week of November we were told to prepare for an exercise; on that day we'll have to wear our denim uniform over our battle dress, we'll have to fill our water bottle, take our anti-gas cape, our metal helmet (without the camouflage netting), our blanket wrapped in the ground sheet and bring it a waiting truck. On the morning of the exercise, we were woken up at five in the morning and we stood ready until eight thirty… and nothing. We paraded for a short while and the sergeant told us to go about our normal duties.

Two days later, on November 28th, we were woken up at 4 in the morning and after breakfast we were given our Mae Wests. We got on the trucks and were driven to the docks where barges were waiting for us and boarded them. Then we waited. I think the sea was too stormy. In any case, the boat never moved for two days.

While we were waiting a sergeant-major in one of the other barges had a severe arthritis attack and was sent to the hospital. I learned later he was repatriated to Canada. An arthritic soldier is not of very much use on the battle front.

All the while we had to get use to living on those barges. We had gas heaters to cook on; lucky ones slept inside the trucks, but most of us lay on the metal bottom of the craft. There was no shelter against the rain and the wind. As we say, we slept under the stars, except that they were hidden behind the thick layer of clouds.

We finally set out on December 2nd, but after only two or three hours the sea was too rough and we came back. The weather improved on the following day and we set out for a boat ride. The next morning we came back towards the English coast and had our landing exercise.

We came back to the base on Saturday and found out we were moving… again! But on Sunday, Lieutenant-Colonel Loree gave us a break and cancelled church parades that morning. On Tuesday, we were all allowed a 48-hour leave; since it's not really long enough to go anywhere, most of us just stayed at the camp or visited the local villages. After that, as expected, the company moved to Longwood House, near Winchester.

Longwood House, now demolished.

Since we got back from the landing exercise and moved to Longwood House we haven't done much beyond the usual routine. But every week we have to clean the manor. Yesterday we were told not to use the sand buckets (a fire extinguishing measure) to burn paper; some guys also used them as urinals, which causes us to have change the sand more often.

Two weeks later, however we moved to Fryern Hall near Chandler's Ford, another village nearby. We don't stay put for very long, but we're starting to get used to all this moving around.

Fryern Hall as seen from the gardens.

Christmas fell on a Saturday this year. There was a church service in the morning and lunch in one of the village building a little after noon. During the evening, a bunch of guys and I bought a keg of beer to liven things up a bit. Since the following day was a Sunday we attended church parade and rested most of the day. But on Monday we had to remove all the decorations.

At the end of December the commanding officer collected funds for repairs to the manor. The guys in our company had to contribute one shilling each. B Company must have caused more damage because they had to give two and a half shillings each.

On New Year's Eve we cleaned our equipment storage and there was a movie in the evening. We were also told that because there isn't enough coke for the stoves, we can only light those after 4:30 p.m.

Last week, Sergeant Anderson of A company, the only one who has the key to the first aid cabinet, made quite a ruckus because the brandy bottle was missing. I wonder how that bottle could disappear without his knowledge since, as I said, he's the only one with key. Luckily the com-

manding officer didn't overly react to all the fuss and just had the bottled replaced.

It got a bit colder after New Year's. We're already in 1944 and the routine of the courses and exercises is starting to wear thin. The soldiers such as ourselves don't know much about the coming events, but we are aware we didn't cross the Atlantic to visit the countryside and experience the different weather - one day we'll go fight the Germans.

Meanwhile the air sirens often wail, we go to the shelters and we ensure that no light can be seen outside. The Germans bomb the important cities, but it seems they aren't aware of our presence because they would certainly bomb us too.

When we visit the nearby villages in the evenings we see how the local population deals with this. At the taverns entrance's for example they built unlit vestibules, so the light from inside can't be seen in the street. All windows are blocked at night by wooden shutters they remove during the day or with very thick curtains.

Besides a few courses we have to attend, it's pretty much routine activities now. Sometimes, like on the first Saturday of the year, the commanding officer organises a show for us in the afternoon. Yesterday there was a play, followed by a magician and a comedian. At other times it's just a movie, or a football game. Around the middle of the month a band from the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals (R.C.C.S.) gave a very good concert.

At the end of January, guys such as myself who hadn't been vaccinated against typhus got a shot. The corporal who was doing it was really good at it and I felt absolutely nothing. It was funny in a way; I was curious to see how he proceeded so I was looking at my arm, the guy behind me asked why I was doing that and distracted me for a moment and before I knew it, it was done.

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January 31, 1944
Hi mom,

I was really happy to get some news from you for the holidays and I hope everyone at home had a great Christmas. There must be a lot of snow by now in Casselman. Here the weather is damp and cold, but not enough for it to snow.

I notice that many of the children have left already, except for the youngest: Richard, Jean-Guy and Cécile; that's still a good number though.

Here, things are quiet enough and as I was saying, the weather isn't very nice. I'm always happy to get news from home.

Raymond

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The cold and damp weather never seems to end and we were reminded not to light the coke heaters before 4:30 p.m. Apparently, we used up too much fuel last month.

I was just given seven days leave from February 7th to the 14th. This time nobody had to persuade me to go; I joined a group of fellow soldiers. We visited local villages rather than go all way to Scotland. If the weather is this miserable here in the south, it must be wicked up there.

Not long after we came back from leave, there was a dentist parade. He examined our teeth and in my case he found I had a cavity and needed a filling. As a matter of fact I needed two, one on that day, the other the next. The drill was not electric, but was activated by a pedal, similar to the one on mom's sewing machine. On top of that, there was no freezing… Ouch!

General Montgomery himself came to inspect the troops at the end of February and made a speech in front of the assembled troops. Boy was the lieutenant-colonel and his staff attentive to all details, especially since he had just returned from leave. The orders were strict and we paid attention.

On March 1st we got a lesson on how to use a Coleman type lamp. I mostly noted that we have to burn the little gauze pouch before lighting the lamp and be careful how we manipulate that pouch. After dinner Corporal

McBride, a really nice guy, organized another dance; as usual I didn't attend, but those who did told me it was a lot of fun.

The following day we went on a twelve-mile march where we practiced eating in our mess tins.

On March 3rd, those who earned it got a ribbon, which they had to sew on their uniform just above their left breast pocket. I don't have the tenure yet, but I could have had the ribbon bar.

One week after we were told to get ready for another barge exercise. Again, we'll have to wear our denim over our serge uniforms, take our gas masks, our blankets rolled up in the ground sheets, our great coats, our backpacks and everything else.

The following day, we all went for that boat ride. To while away the hours, some of the guys were playing poker or dice; some were waging considerable amounts. I don't know where they found the money on our small pay, but that's their business. The only noteworthy incident was that Staff-Sergeant Ford had to be evacuated when his ulcer perforated. I heard later he too was sent back to Canada. Half the barges stopped a bit too far from the shore and some guys had to jump waist deep in the water and walk to the beach; luckily my barge got in much closer.

When we returned from the exercise we were told that the Germans had sunk more than the usual amount of boats in the North Atlantic and that many letter bags were lost with them. The letters from our families don't always reach us, as I've mentioned before.

Training continues. There are courses on how to recognize booby-traps left by the Germans, on first aid of course, on martial law and we also go on marches.

On one evening during the third week in March there was a severe air-raid nearby. I don't know exactly what the enemy was aiming for but Air Defence sent flares to illuminate the sky to help us see the German bombers, which made me think of fireworks.

A little later we got an order to tell us to write our names and serial number inside our helmet and on our equipment. I suppose it's so that we are more easily identifiable if ever we're killed.

On the last day of the month there were written and oral exams, and I learned I'd be part of a group of 50 soldiers who will take a course from April 3rd to 13th; we're definitely busier lately.

While we were on our course, we had to prepare to move, again. We've moved close to the village of Botley and we're back in tents. In this camp we're with the Regina Rifles Regiment, which has a Scottish band, so

they play the bagpipes of course; that bothers some guys who consider it more noise than music. I rather like the sound.

Around the same time, the middle of April, we were told only to write our regiment number and our rank on the envelope of the letters we send. It seems the censorship is getting tighter. We were also reminded of the light curfew: no campfire after nightfall, no smoke during the day, and not to hang our laundry where an enemy aircraft could spot it from the air. Also, now that we're in tents we are only allowed one shower every second day.

On the 19th, the entire company lined up to get a booster shot against typhus and we were told to get our parade uniforms ready for the inspections of the Allied commanders as of April 25th.

The first inspection went rather well on the scheduled day; the troops were in formation in a large field next to the camp, all lined up at attention, all polished, waiting for General Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces. It must have taken an hour to get us all there in good order, and another hour's wait before the general got there. Once he was there he walked through the ranks, stopping now and again to ask questions or make a comment: where the soldier was from, what he thought of the conditions and the food at camp, things like that. After his inspection we could stand at ease, but had to say in formation while the high-ranking officers met in a tent in the middle of the field. Finally they all came out, the general got into his staff car and left; then we broke ranks and return to our tents.

A few days later, it was General Montgomery's turn to inspect the troops, and finally, King George VI himself. This time the entire staff was stiff as a board!

After those three inspections we were told that we still had one day of rest per week, but that we couldn't go too far from the camp.

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May 4, 1944
Botley, England

Hi mom,

I'm doing well and things are fine here. Spring has arrived, but as I wrote before, winters here aren't as cold as they are at home; it's just damp and grey. I was surprised to read in your last letter that the entire family moved from Casselman to Orléans. I suppose it's closer to Ottawa where dad works now. So, you're renting one half of the house of this Mr. Vinette. I hope everyone is comfortable there, even if Rita and Richard stayed back in Casselman at *ma tante Aurore's* place so they could finish the school year. They must have grown quite a bit since I last saw them.

I often think of all of you, and things here are going well; they are keeping us busy most of the time, and I look forward to reading your letters.

Raymond

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At the beginning of the month of May the entire camp was consigned to barracks because of a military operation we're not involved with. But it's important enough for the commander to cancel all the usual external exercises.

When all those who were involved in the operation came back to camp we started water proofing the vehicles. We have to coat the batteries of the motors and all the electrical connections with some sort of putty; lengthen the exhaust pipe to well above the chassis; in other words we have to make sure water doesn't flood the engine. If I get this right, judging by the exercises we were sent on up to now, I don't think the landing in France will be a neat little job and that we'll just come to a nice, handy port; we'll have to travel some distance in the water.

I also noticed that on top of water proofing the trucks and jeeps they are painting them with camouflage colours. I'm really not quite sure, but I also don't think we're staying in England very much longer.

On May 10th, the senior officers removed all badges and chevrons from their uniforms, and on the 18th, they organized meetings to tell us that the landing that we had crossed the Atlantic for is happening soon and to inform us of some details. The guys had many questions; some were worried of course, but I was anxious to get on our way.

One officer told us there would be a white building a bit to the left of where we would land, but that we wouldn't have to bother about it since the French Resistance will have taken care of it before we got there. They never spoke however about the blockhouses where the Germans would hunker down and wait for us with machine guns and canons…

A few days after the meeting with high-ranking officers, the camp was sealed to any visitors and of course we couldn't leave either. A troupe of actors who had come to entertain us was stuck in the camp. On May 27th, we had to exchange our English money for French francs.

The weather was warming up; I hoped it would hold for the landing that should happen very soon now. The troops were gradually being sent to the marshalling area at Chandler's Ford, closer to Southampton at the military port of Portsmouth.

June 6 – The Landing

The boats off the coast of Normandy.

In the very early hours of June 4th we started boarding the barges and the transport ships with rations for 24 hours, sea-sickness pills, and, in case they had no effect, a vomit bag. Floating high above some of the boats we could see huge helium balloons that were hitched to them, to prevent enemy fighter pilot from dive-bombing us. The weather was foul and the sea was choppy. A Company, mine, boarded a ship with the lieutenant-colonel's headquarters. B Company was in another ship or one of a multitude of barges surrounding us. We spent the night and the following day in the port, and very late in the evening of June 5th the boats started the crossing; the men on board were excited, nervous, or just terrified at what was awaiting them, the huge helium balloons above us were swaying the wind… This is it!

We got just off the coast of Normandy in the early morning hours of June 6th, the weather was calmer and our ship stopped about half a mile away from the beach itself. We spent the morning peering at the distant

coast trying to make out what was going on, and wishing my eyesight was better. We could see that the barges were headed towards the beach or were already landed, but we were too far away to see exactly what was happening. Our battleships' canons were pounding the defensive works the Germans had built from where they were manning their machine guns and canons aimed at the guys who had landed already. We learned later that B Company landed around 11:00 a.m. on the 6th, following the C Company of the Highland Light Infantry and set up an Advanced Dressing Station in the church of the little village of Bernière-sur-Mer.

There were many boats like ours waiting to land, some with their huge helium balloons floating over them, like I said, to prevent German bombers from dive-bombing. But the only planes we saw that day were the Allied ones who were trying as best they could to silence the guns and canons in the German blockhouses along the beach.

If we couldn't see what was happening on the beaches in front of us because they were half a mile away, we could see very well that some boats close to us were taking on wounded men, a lot of wounded men, and we could also see among them some German prisoners. I guess that was a good sign: we had taken some advantage in the battle. Once they were full, the boats headed back to England.

The men and vehicles landing on the coast of Normandy from the barges and ships.

Finally, around 3:00 p.m. our ship started to head towards the beach and at 4:00 p.m. we got into the trucks that were on board. I tell you, if the

guys were nervous before this, the anxiety was now at a feverish pitch. The ship came to a stop a few feet from the land and the front just opened up like giant garage doors, the trucks just rolled out and onto the sand of the beach. As planned, we drove all the way to a quarry near the village of Bény-sur-Mer where we got off. The captain told us to set up our equipment in the church in the middle of village.

Sherman tanks of the 4th Armoured Brigade in the village of Reviers on June 12, 1944. (IWM)

As we were nearing the beach, we could see that some of trucks and even some tanks, had not been waterproofed properly and had stalled in the water, their engines flooded. In that case there were special towing tanks that pulled them out of the way. I was rather proud that our truck, the one I had worked on, rolled on without a problem. But of course, we couldn't travel very far that way or the motor would have quickly overheated

Once we had set up the dressing station in the church at Bény-sur-Mer, we were free to explore the area, but not too far and cautiously. Two of my good friends from Montréal and I started looking around and found what must have been some sort of headquarters; we saw a few identification cards strewn across the floor. I guess the soldiers had left in a hurry or had not wanted to be easily identified if they were taken prisoner by the Allies -

a bit like our officers who had removed the chevrons from their uniform a few days before the landing.

Lieutenant-Colonel Loree and his staff, landed the following day around 5:30 p.m. and set up his headquarters in the village of Reviers, a bit west of where we were. Some even landed on the June 8th.

The day after we landed the commanding officer asked for volunteers to work in the field hospital at Bernière-sur-Mer; since I had nothing better to do, I offered to go with Captain Decter who headed our division. The wounded got to us by ambulance: they had either been shot, hit by shrapnel, some were burned, others suffered broken bones. When the ambulances, full of casualties, arrived we sorted them by how serious their condition was and I helped move them to from the waiting tent to the operating room. When the doctor had finished operating, I helped take them to the recovery tent. If the guy's wound was too severe he would be sent to back to England and eventually go back home to Canada. We were very busy because that day there was certainly no shortage of casualties.

Although we were busy, we had a few moments to take a break and were offered cans of hot chocolate. I had never seen one of those before. The cans were cold, but when we pulled the tab to open them, I'm not sure how, but something caused the hot chocolate to suddenly warm up. It was really good and it hit the spot.

After our shift we were free to explore the surroundings; so, my two friends from Montréal and I carefully started exploring the not too distant streets. We hadn't gone very far when we met two couples who invited us for a drink of barley and chicory (the Germans had requisitioned all the coffee for their soldiers). They were quite surprised to meet Canadian soldiers who spoke French. After a while, they asked me how come they understood me better than my two friends who, as I said, were from Montréal. I explained that while I was careful of my pronunciations, they spoke as if talking to their mothers.

The younger of the two couples, who might have been in their thirties, told me about themselves and their story was very interesting. The husband worked in the kitchen of a hospital in Caen, which was now on the other the side of the frontline and where he therefore could not go, of course. He also told me that not too long ago, he had been drafted in the compulsory labour service (for which the French acronym was S.T.O.) the Germans had put in place with the help of the Vichy Government since they had signed the armistice in 1940. The men and women who could work and who's employment were not necessary in France where sent to work in German factories

anywhere they were needed in German occupied territory. He was soon to leave for he knew not where, when his boss at the hospital saw him in line and asked what he was doing. When he found out his employee had been drafted, he went to the *Kommandant* of the area and explained that this man worked in a hospital and could not leave and that's how he was exempted from the much-reviled *S.T.O.* But as I said, since the Allies had landed he couldn't go to work.

All the while, the Allies are progressing on the march across western France. The Air Force and the Navy ships on the beach are still bombing the German positions as best they can. But at night the German Air Force tries to bomb us.

On June 12th the high-command sent mom, and to all the other mothers who had a son who participated to D-Day, a telegram from the Defence Department telling them we had taken part in the landing in Normandy and we were fine, and not to worry; we weren't wounded our dead. Although they were probably happy to hear the news, I'm sure they must have been even more worried now that the fighting had started in earnest. Of course, a different message was sent to the parents of those who had been wounded, or were dead.

Now that the fighting began we can forget about the barracks and or tents. Often we sleep where we could find a bit a shelter, under the canvas awnings added to the trucks. Personally, I prefer to lie down under the big truck's back axle; it probably offers more protection against any shrapnel from shells that might fall.

Apart from that, nothing much is happening and our unit isn't very busy. Our command reminded us in the middle of June that we shouldn't scatter in the fields with the meal we take from the canteen and also that we can write in our letters that we are in France, but not where we are exactly. But then, our parents already know we are in France because of the telegram they were sent.

Although in the first few days our unit wasn't very busy, now that the Canadian and British forces are nearing the city of Caen, the Germans seem to have organized their resistance and we are getting many more casualties; mostly Canadians, and sometimes enemy soldiers.

Personnel of a Field Ambulance, R.C.A.M.C., carrying a wounded man on a stretcher at an Advanced Dressing Station.

Stretcher bearers go on the battle field to find the wounded; they patch them up as best they can, applying bandages as required or performing first

aid and using a jeep that functions as an ambulance, bring them to the Advanced Dressing Station, a kind of an emergency room.

When they arrive, two guys, sometimes more, take them out of the jeep and bring them to the doctor who cleans the wounds and changes the bandages. Then we take the patient on his stretcher to a waiting ambulance to be transported to the field hospital situated a few miles behind the front line.

In the most urgent cases the doctors in the dressing station perform operations; in that case we put the stretcher on a bunch of crates, just high enough so the doctors and nurses (men, I never saw a women work at an Advanced Dressing Station) can perform whatever was needed as best they can. Field hospitals are better equipped, of course, since that is where the wounded are really treated.

It happens, of course, that the wounded die on the way to us or pass away while we are trying to save them. In that case we put the bodies aside and wait for the chaplain to come and identify them and note where they will be buried. We wrap them in a blanket, dig a hole, deep enough, but not too deep either, and bury them. They will stay there until a proper military cemetery can be established.

As I mentioned, it also happens that we treat enemy soldiers, although most times the infantry takes care of them, but the wounded do come to us. Sometimes we keep bilingual (German-English) guys with us for a couple of weeks if they are willing to translate for us to help us care for their fellow soldiers. Those who surrender are often happy since as one of those who were waiting to be treated once told me, “the war is over for us”.

Besides our duties, nothing much happens here. The food, of course, is not as good as when we lived in proper camps like in Canada and in England, but we are not starving. We mostly eat canned corned beef and hardtack we dunk in tea or coffee to soften them up. We can only dream about bacon and eggs now and we are not allowed to get food for the civilian population since they have very little to begin with. The Germans took all they could, and then some, to supply their army.

When we walk around the liberated villages, we also had to be careful since there might still be collaborators or German sympathizers lurking. We sometimes witness some Frenchmen trying to get even with those they feel had been too friendly with the enemy. In those cases it is best not to interfere.

The weather is getting much warmer also since it is already the end of June and nearly summer. Since we don’t have barracks we don’t have showers either. We take advantage of every little river or stream to wash up

as best we can, but we have to be careful we do it downstream from the water intake for the operation room and the canteen.

A couple of days after, the stretcher bearers were told we couldn't wear the Red Cross arm band when on guard duty. It really makes no difference though; all we do is ask anyone who wants to enter the camp to identify himself and we have no weapons. We really couldn't stop anyone who would be determined. They might as well put guard dogs at the gate; at least they would bark, but maybe the lieutenant-colonel is afraid they might also bite someone.

One of my favourite pastimes was cut short around that time. One of the dispatch riders, a friendly French-Canadian, allowed us to ride his motorcycle but someone complained and the commanding officer put an end to that in one of his daily orders. A shame really.

The Fall of Caen

Summer is progressing and so are we. The Germans are vigorously defending their positions around the city of Caen and our dressing station at Bény-sur-Mer is much busier than it had been.

On July 8th we were sent to Villon-les-Buissons, a bit closer to Caen and are busier still. The officers who treat the wounded had very little rest and there were many Germans among their patients again, some soldiers also suffered shell-shock. This time my duties were to bring the wounded from the ambulance-jeep to the doctors' tent.

Since we left Bernières-sur-Mer, where we landed on June 6th, we met many refugees on roads, fleeing west away from the combat zone. The Allied forces are going from the west and the south. At first we liberated mostly villages or the countryside, so there weren't so many folks fleeing. But now we're nearing Caen, a bigger city, the long line of refugees is never ending. These people abandoned their homes, or what's left of them, piling whatever they could on carts, sometimes on bicycles, or even just on their backs; there are no cars of course since even if they had one, they couldn't get gas to make it run. We don't have time to stop and talk to them, so I'm not sure if they're happy to be liberated. For now they're just trying to get away from the fighting. I suppose there are some who are going towards the German zone, but there is quite a crowd coming our way and I tell you, they're a pitiful sight; I really wouldn't trade places with them.

French refugees fleeing the fight in the city of Caen in July, 1944.

As of yesterday, the Allies have taken most of the city of Caen from the Germans (except for the northern suburbs across the Orne River); the action was sustained mostly by Canadian troops. But we still have to be careful since the Germans probably left all kinds of booby traps, and there still are some die-hard Nazis in the city.

On the morning of July 11th, the captain ordered us to pack our belongings and put them in the 60-tonne truck, again - we're moving. As we were riding we realized we were entering the city of Caen itself. It had just been liberated and as usual we were just following the infantry that had participated in a hard-fought battle to take the city. Apparently, the Germans had managed to retake part of the city core, but had finally retreated. Be that as it may, we saw the results of the battle as we passed through the streets. Some of the buildings were still standing and some even in rather good shape, but most were damaged, others were just demolished. The worst was in the city core, which we saw the following day: it was so damaged that in some places the debris was five-feet deep in the streets and those buildings still standing were threatening to collapse as we passed.

Downtown Caen just after it was liberated.

Just like in most of the villages we've been through until now, the inhabitants of Caen greeted us as liberators; on the sidewalks along the streets we passed through they must have lined-up three or four deep on each side. I suppose it also made a difference that we weren't the infantry and had no weapons. It struck me also that even though we'd seen so many refugees there were so many that had stayed in the city. Caen was the first bigger city we had liberated since the landing, before that we had mostly seen small villages and the countryside.

Captain Decter set up our section in a former German headquarters in a suburb of the city, near the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade. This is a rather large house with sheds and what looks to me that must have been a chicken coop; there is also a bomb shelter.

We still have to be careful as the Germans on the other side of the Orne River are defending their position and aiming bombs and shells our way. I decided to explore the house we're in. The Germans that were here before left a lot of ammunition. I was in the courtyard when the captain came out of the house and asked me why I wasn't with the others in the bunker. It was really an order to take cover so I obeyed. Since I was the last guy to come in there wasn't much room for me, so I just stayed at the foot of

the stairs. I hadn't been there one minute when a shell landed exactly where I had been standing and exploded, hot shrapnel actually landed at my feet at the bottom of the shelter's stairs and I picked it up: hot but not enough to burn by now.

I didn't pay much attention to it then, buy that day my mother's prayers must have been answered; if the captain had not come into the yard at that precise moment and ordered me to take cover, mom would have been one of those unfortunate mothers who receive that dreaded telegram she prayed to God so much never to receive.

Once again, we were reminded not to touch the munitions left behind by the Germans, it's most certainly booby trapped. Fortunately, the lot they left in the house we're in now seems to be fine, they probably left too quickly.

After a few days, the resistance in the northern suburbs across the river was dislodged and the shelling stopped. The dressing station became quieter and we had time to tend to personal things like doing some laundry. We have to make do with what we have as we don't have the amenities we had in the barracks. Most of the time we use old hardtack metal boxes that we fill with water and heat up the water with a torch or some such thing. We hang the clothes to dry where ever we find a clean spot; we can't hope to find a clothesline here.

About a week after we got to Caen we learned that Captain Decter was exchanged for Captain Gibson from the Highland Light Infantry. We're sad to see him go; he was a really good captain, and all the guys liked him. But since we got here he worked tirelessly and he was the only doctor in our section. Meanwhile we left the house we were in and moved to a camp in Gazelle, where we rested a bit but the following day we got into the trucks and were brought to a place called Couvre-Chef, a little outside the city.

The new captain reminded us that stretcher bearers can't go in the emergency room where patients are treated unless they are called. I guess some guys came in before they were asked.

On July 24th, we learned that two stretcher bearers in B Company were wounded by a shell during one of the bombings east of the city at Tilly-la-Campagne. Apparently, when Costello, one of the soldiers, was hit he said "they got me", the other guy, his friend Hughes said, "me too". In the first aid tent Hughes asked about Costello and the attendant told him he had already left for the field hospital in an ambulance. When he got to the

hospital, Hughes found out his friend Costello didn't make it. We're not part of the infantry, but our job can be dangerous too.

Since there are a lot of bombings lately, my two Montreal friends Marcel Lapointe, Yvon Clermont and I decided to build a makeshift shelter in a ditch along the road. Marcel managed to find a shovel in a shed somewhere, and we widened the ditch, we also found a corrugated sheet of tin that we put across the widened ditch and added some soil on top. It looked sturdy enough.

That very night there was an air raid. As usual I was sleeping under the big truck and never paid attention as the guys were taking shelter as best they could. When I finally decided to go hide in our handy bunker, it was full of guys and I just couldn't fit in there. I ended up flattened on the side of a ditch somewhere. In the end, no one got hurt, but we found out later that at least one ambulance was destroyed.

We were reminded lately that it is strictly forbidden to give, and mostly sell, any equipment or clothing from the Army to the civil population, to anyone really. Those who are caught doing so will be "severely" punished. We were also told that if we "found" weapons on enemy soldiers, wounded or dead, we had to hand them over to the sergeant; yeah, we might just do that.

Finally around the end of July the fighting subsided a bit in our area and the commanding officer organized movies in a barn close by and we could rest a little.

We Follow the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade

On the July 30th, we were ordered to pack our things and get in the trucks. With B Company we went to the little town of Barbière, which must have been at least 10 miles behind the front line. We were given a little vacation it seems.

The lieutenant-colonel ordered us to prepare for the general's inspection. Once again we'll have to be spic-and-span; they even supplied gasoline to clean our uniforms. We were careful while using it to be outside, but still I heard of at least one soldier who became ill.

Be that as it may, we were ready for Major-General Keller's inspection on the afternoon of August 3rd. We learned afterwards that he was very satisfied. As far as I'm concerned, all that doesn't really matter; I saw him standing on a kind of stage when he was receiving the men's salute; I must have been 50 feet from him.

Since we got to Barbière, I noticed an infantry soldier named Lapointe, being punished. I guess the judge at his court martial hearing didn't think he deserved a prison sentence, so he sent him here to be subjected to half an hour of parade duty after dinner. Anyway, one evening he got upset at the sergeant and tried to assault him and take his weapon. If he wasn't sentenced to prison the first time, this time he's definitely going and probably for some time.

We spent a good week at Barbière and on the August 10th got the order to get ready to move, it was a nice rest. But as we neared the little town of Fleury-sur-Orne, we set up a camp in an orchard just south-east of Caen, on the other side of the river. There, as usual, B Company went its own way and despite a lot of traffic on the country roads we finally got to Roquancourt, still further south-east of Caen.

Since we booted the Germans out of Caen they keep on fighting while retreating and we are kept quite busy with many casualties going through our dressing station and for some reason we're getting quite a lot of enemy soldiers as well. Some guys find that we are just too busy, but personally I find the busier we are, the more the hours go by quickly.

A few days ago, while we were sorting the wounded, I was surprised to find a black soldier in a Canadian uniform and told the stretcher bearer beside me how odd this was. He answered that the guy was just as white as I was, it's just that his face was badly burnt when his tank was hit by a shell. He was lucky he could get out; some of his colleagues probably didn't and would have gone directly to a makeshift cemetery.

On August 16th we were told to pack up and headed with the entire A Company and the headquarters to a place near Brettville-le-Rabet where the lieutenant-colonel set up his headquarters as we went on to Ouilly-le-Tesson.

The following day, A Company went on to Rouvre where Section 2 set up an Advanced Dressing Station, Section 1 and 3 (mine) went on all the way to Olendon.

The guys think it's kind of funny the lieutenant-colonel nearly always orders us to set up the dressing station in or around an orchard; in fact they call him 'Orchard Loree'. It may be funny in a way, but the trees are a screen through which the German bombers flying above can't see us and it keeps us relatively safe.

On August 18th we're still on the road; this time we got near the village of Morteau Couliboeuf where the 22nd Field Ambulance joined us. There I met a guy called Dion I had not seen since I was at Camp Borden in Canada. Back then, Dion had been in the Medical Corps, just like me; now

he was a cook, therefore in the Services Corps, so he was better paid since he had a trade.

Well, of course, we didn't stay there long. Two days later, we got in the trucks again and headed to Louvières-en-Auge, about 10 miles south-east. Once we set up our dressing station, we got two trucks full of German wounded; apparently they were headed somewhere else, but for some reason they had to change direction. We were so busy with those we didn't see much of our guys.

As I was waiting as usual for the captain to call me to get the patient he had finished treating in his tent I noticed a group of Germans who were waiting their turn to see the doctor. One of them tried to say a few words in very broken English, so trying my best also I attempted to say hello.

We started exchanging a few sentences and I offered them one of the chocolate bars I had in my pocket. Two of the guys made a gesture to accept, but a third said something in German and the two first guys removed their hands. I understood then that their command must have told the same story about poisoned food. I took another one of my bars and took a bite; then they gratefully took the one I was offering.

The guy who had spoken in German to stop the others from accepting the chocolate took a pocket knife from one of the pockets of his uniform and offered it to me. In the end, these guys were much like us: ordinary men who had been drafted by their government to fight for their country.

The night we got to Louvières we were hit by Allied bombers and although there were no human casualties, we suffered quite a bit of damage. Apparently, the guys who sent missile signals to the pilots made a mistake and we were the target instead of the Germans.

On the morning of August 23rd, the headquarters, B Company and the 9th Brigade joined us at Louvières with orders that we go with them towards the south-east. All these people travelling together slows everyone down considerably, on top of that we have to be careful of the fluctuating front line. That night we reached Les Champeaux, five miles from where we started. When we stop and we don't set up the dressing station we just camp around the trucks if that's possible. The tarps are set up around the trucks like a big tent; but as usual I just take cover under the big 60-ton truck so I won't get hit by shrapnel of the shells that might fall.

The following day we left the area of Les Champeaux around five thirty in the morning and travelled through Vimoutiers, stopping at Meulles around seven in the morning and A Company stayed there all day. We travelled approximately 10 miles today, which is better than yesterday, but I no-

tice that we're headed north now; the Germans are retreating towards their own country.

On the 25th, B Company left our group at six in the morning, our company and the headquarters reached Thibouville around 10:30 a.m. and we stayed there for lunch, but we were not allowed to get down from the trucks. We started moving a little after we ate and stopped for the night, but could not get out of the trucks then either. We ate our rations of hardtacks and slept in the trucks as best we could. During the night we could hear planes flying above and bombs falling nearby, too near for me. We never knew if they were Allied or enemy planes.

Ever since the middle of August we were nearly always travelling in the back of the trucks. Finally on the 26th, late at night we got to La Saussaye, where we stayed for a couple of days and where it was also relatively quiet. We could do a bit of laundry, some guys wrote letters to their parents or their girlfriends. We weren't very busy, but the corporal ordered me on latrine duties: well, as I say, idle hands are the devil's work.

But all good things come to an end, and on the 30th we got back on the trucks and started travelling. We crossed the River Seine in the village of Elbeuf; the Germans are retreating so quickly they didn't have a chance to destroy that bridge. That night we could get out of the trucks and camped around (and under) them. The following day, August 31st, we crossed the city of Rouen in the late afternoon. The people of the city cheered us as we drove by, and I noted that the city, although damaged, had not been as destroyed as Caen had been. We just drove through the city and continued on until we reached Quincampoix where we set up our dressing station. There, the corporal told me I was going to help the cook in the field kitchen; that or carrying the wounded on a stretcher, same difference really.

As usual, we stayed put until the morning and after breakfast we were on our way: the dressing station, the field kitchen and all of our baggage. We passed by the village of St Saëns and stopped near Bures for dinner jumped back in the trucks and were on our way until about eight o'clock in the evening. Somewhere in the country side we set up the dressing station for the night. In the early hours of the following morning we had breakfast and were off. Finally, at about four in the afternoon on September 3rd, the captain ordered us to set up the full field ambulance near the city of Saucourt, but there were hardly any wounded. Here, as just about everywhere we went, the French cheered us as we arrived. But as I mentioned before, the Ambulance Corps is much less intimidating than the infantry. We roll around in trucks, jeeps, and ambulances that bear big red crosses on them, and we have no weapons.

On September 4th, under the command of Captain Willis, A Company was ordered to replace B Company, the Field Ambulance that most closely follows the 9th Infantry Brigade, and we made our way near the village of Franleu. This time the corporal didn't put me on latrine duty, but I helped the cook in the field kitchen, and the following evening I was on guard duty.

We stayed there while the headquarters and B Company were headed further north. While there I noted two daily orders that struck me as out of the ordinary. The first was about soldiers who wounded themselves or cause themselves to be wounded in order to be discharged and go back home to Canada. This of course is strictly illegal, but some guys are so fed up of the fighting that they'd rather be wounded to go home. If it can be proven they have caused this, they're not going home, more likely they'll be dishonourably discharged and sent to jail with hard labour.

The other odd daily order was about eating shellfish. It seems some guys aren't very happy with the field kitchen food and their hardtacks, so they ate some shell fish they got a hold of somewhere and suffered food poisoning because it wasn't fresh. So now we are ordered not to eat any food that comes from the civilian population, especially not shellfish.

Besides that, the day before yesterday, Captain Will saw me in the morning and ordered me to climb in his jeep with his driver and himself as they were going on a reconnaissance for a possible future location for the dressing station. One way or the other, I didn't mind going for a ride.

We must have been on the road in the countryside for about 15 minutes when the captain told me to get out of the jeep and wait for him; again, I just do what I'm told. I must have been waiting there for about 10 minutes when a local Frenchman came over and started a conversation:

- *Good morning young man. I usually mind my own business, but can I ask you what you're doing, standing there alone on this road in front of this field?*
- *I'm waiting for my captain, sir, I replied*
- *Well, that's all very well, young man, but did you know there are Germans hiding in that field in front of us, well hidden in the tall grass, of course.*

What to do? I could not really go away from where I was. The captain told me to wait for him there, exactly there. I'm not really sure how long it was before the captain came back, but it seemed like an eternity.

Luckily, he came back before I saw any Germans, but most importantly, before any of them could see me. Boy, was I glad to get back to camp!

On September 13th we were moving again. This time we got to La Vignette, just at the border between France and Belgium, Section 2 went ahead, but we stopped there and were pretty busy. The Germans around the city of Boulogne are mounting quite a resistance and the fighting seems to be fierce, so our dressing station is treating many wounded. The corporal put me with the team that was receiving them. As usual we carry them off the ambulance and bring them to the tent where the doctor examines them and then, once he's finished with them, to another waiting ambulance that will transport them to the field hospital well behind the front. On one of the trips the doctor asked me to go with one of the wounded and I returned with an empty ambulance.

I also remember one of the wounded in particular around this time who was hit by a bullet at one of his wrists; his entire hand was very damaged, and we could see some broken bones protruding the skin. The doctor told me he might be able to save three of his fingers and I felt very sorry for this guy. As I was carrying him to the waiting ambulance, he told me he had been waiting for this wound for a long time now. He was alive, his wound was not too serious and he was going back home. In the end, in spite of his wound, or even maybe because it, I think there might have been many soldiers who envied him right now.

On September 19th, we left La Vignette and put up our station at Huplandre, near Boulogne, but Section 1 went right into the city itself. Our section (3) joined them four days later.

The conditions once we joined Section 1 in the city are not so bad. We are located in a former German hospital, of course all the enemy occupants, personnel and patients, have been evacuated. Our unit was installed in some sort of dormitory and we're pretty crowded; but I found a little room that might have been a linen closet, as for myself, it's small, but I'm alone.

Another advantage of this place is that we traded the field kitchen for the full kitchen of the hospital so the food is much better. It won't last of course, but as long as it does, we might as well take advantage of it. All the while, I can't say I'll miss the hardtacks. Also for now we're progressively less and less busy. The Germans who were still in the citadel of Boulogne surrendered on September 22nd, the day before we got here, and the fighting in the city is just about over.

We stayed billeted in this hospital in Boulogne for a good week. At first, as I mentioned, we were busy, but as the day went by the wounded be-

came sparser since by now the fighting had moved to the north, in Belgium and even in Holland.

On the morning of October 2nd we packed our bags and the ambulance and got in the trucks again. That day, we reached the area around L'Abeele in Belgium, passing through the towns of Saint-Omer, Cassel and Steenvoorde. Some of the names of the places in the area sound very odd.

As we were moving that morning, the commanding officer ordered that we be given our rations in packets for two men at once. Some guys didn't find that handy and were griping about the poor taste of the food. Personally, I couldn't find much difference.

Holland

We were still in the trucks in a convoy formation on October 7th, travelling in a north-eastern direction as usual. We reached Sluiskil in Holland. Luckily the Allies managed to take at least one bridge before the Germans could blow it up as they retreated. I was told we sent paratroopers behind the enemy lines so they could take care of such business as much as possible. Sometimes it works, sometimes not.

We set up our dressing station in an old windmill when we got here; it's a bit battle worn but still in good enough shape. As I was mentioning, since were following the infantry, and the Germans are resisting as best they can. Most of the buildings we see are pretty banged up or just demolished by all the shelling and machine gun bullets.

It didn't take long for the wounded to show up once we were set up. It seemed to me like our guys had fallen on some sort of minefield; all the wounded the jeep ambulances were bringing had their feet nearly shorn off, but not quite: the foot was just dangling there hanging on by mere tendons; sometimes a few bones were still intact. The break was so precise, I think the doctors at the field hospitals will be able to fix it; well, at least I hope.

But as the day progressed, and seeing so many wounded guys coming out of the ambulances with the same wounded ankle, I could feel a dark anger rising inside of me. At that moment, if a stretcher bearer had brought a German soldier out of his ambulance, I'm not sure what I would've done to him. For sure, if I had been in the infantry and had access to a weapon, I would have gone to the front and tried to kill as many enemy soldiers as I could. But there were no guns to be had, and right now there were all the poor guys coming to us in every jeep that came around, and we needed to care for them as best we could, so I just did what I had to do.

I remember stories people use to say about the Great War when I was a little boy around our place; how the soldiers must have been drugged to have battled on as they did. Well I can tell you this for sure: those who said that had no idea what they were talking about. When you see the enemy kill or maim all your fellow soldiers and your friends, there is only one thought in your mind and that is to defend or avenge those guys. There is no need for any drug.

Anyway, two days later, we exchanged our bank notes because the newly re-established governments of Belgium and the Netherlands had re-instituted their national currencies. Since we were in Holland we had to purchase whatever we wanted in guilders now. But we were also told not to exchange our money with the local population.

That same week we were offered to buy Victory Bonds; an amount will be deducted from our pay until it is paid in full. I bought some for mom. If ever something should happen to me the money would go directly to her: God knows she needs the money right now.

Ever since we got to Holland I notice also that the people here were much worse off than those I have seen in France and Belgium. They are almost all very skinny, some frankly skeletal. I even heard that some died of hunger last winter. I can't figure out why the Germans treated them so badly.

It might be because they have nothing to wear that some are wearing these wooden clogs. I know it is part of their traditional costume, but I find it hard to believe they would choose to wear those things. Of course they remove them before they go inside any house, and I noted also that they put them under the trough when it rains: I have no idea why.

We ended up spending a good two weeks in that windmill, until we moved on to Kerselare; our section ended up in a barn and I set myself up in a comfortable corner. So I ended up spending the evening of my birthday, October 22nd, rather quietly in some barn corner, which is rather better than in an orchard, around or under a truck, or even still on the edge of some ditch along a road to nowhere.

Now that fall is well on its way the weather is turning considerably colder and a couple of days ago we received two more blankets. As the season progresses the days are getting nippy and the nights downright frosty.

The following day we were ordered to add a cherry coloured felt band under our badge on our cap. The problem is there is no cherry colored felt to be had. The commanding officer told us to find some wherever we can. I managed to find some, but not everyone did.

The same day there was a new shoulder flash for our uniform. I really don't know why they are doing so many changes to the uniform but we have to conform: it's the Army.

On October 24th we were sent to replace B Company at Balhofstede – what a name! Luckily I'm not the driver of the truck, we would have been lost since we passed the border into Belgium.

Anyway, we got there a bit late because, as were leaving, the front wheels of our truck got stuck in the mud and Captain Willis had to send for another big truck to pull us out. As we got to Balhofstede we learned that a truce was agreed to with the local Germans and they were evacuating their patients in the Greode hospital. Besides the German wounded there were also Allied prisoners (who were no longer prisoner) as well as civilians. The Germans being transferred must have found the move uncomfortable because of the bad fall weather. But on top of that there are the destructions of all those battles: the torn-up houses, the obstructions on the roads, the blown out bridges and bad conditions of the roads full of mud ruts.

Here I also met a friendly German prisoner who was working in the hospital's kitchen; my English is not very good and neither was his but we managed to communicate. The other day, in the middle of a conversation, he told me to wait a minute; he went to his room and brought back his ceremonial sword he had hidden somewhere. He certainly could not have brought it with him in the prisoners' camp where he was going, but it was nice of him to offer it to me.

German soldier's ceremonial sword

We are busy here for the last two days, but we haven't been able to install a proper generator. So, in the evening we have to light the Coleman lamps in our quarters, but mostly in the operating areas.

On the 29th, nearly at the end of the month, we climbed aboard the trucks and left the hospital and the town of Groede. We passed through Schoondijke, Oostburg, and stopped at Zuidzande on October 31st. Once there, Captain Willis had to order more stretchers and blankets because he was expecting us to be busy. The Germans still have a lot of fight in them even if I noticed that for a while there had been less shelling around us, ever since we crossed into to Holland actually. Maybe they're short on ammunition…

In the first week of November, however we were reminded not to wander alone outside the camp in the streets of the neighbouring villages, especially not at night. Even if most of the people are happy to be liberated by the Allied troops, there could still be some Nazi sympathizers lurking about. I never heard tell of any attack myself, but it must have happened if the commanding officer takes the trouble of reminding us.

We spent two or three days in Zuidzande and went to join the infantry around Ghent where we stayed for a couple of days. Then we rode in the trucks for a few more days, passing through villages and small towns until we got to Nijmegen on November 11th.

When we got there I noticed one of my kit bags, which was unusually in a special transport truck, was missing. Whoever took it must already have sold all of its contents on the local black-market. Meanwhile I got an entire new kit, but I'm sure there are things missing since the list I gave the corporal probably wasn't complete.

Winter in Nijmegen

Anyway, we are billeted with the headquarters in a rather big building in the suburbs of Nijmegen; it's quite comfortable. I understand it used to be an old Jesuit college. Before we got here an American field ambulance occupied the building. In fact they still use the kitchen so our cook has to use the field kitchen until they leave. They finally left on November 17th.

I'm not sure where the officers are, but they're lodged somewhere in the building. Our unit (No 3) is accommodated in a large room that must have been a classroom. They put rows of single beds: mattresses but no pillows. So I put my helmet under one end of mattress.

The building is also big enough that civilians also work as nurses, and there are about forty nuns from some American congregation.

Ever since we got here the sergeant has taken to distributing our daily ration of rum differently. He used to just pour the ounce into a cup and that was it. But some guys were selling their rations to other soldiers, who got a bit too tipsy. So now he pours it in a cup of coffee, tea, or even just water. A bit before Christmas, the commanding officer offered for us to save our daily ration until then, so we could have more on that day, and everyone was quite in favour of that.

Nijmegen after the liberation in October 1944.

There is a lot of talk about a dance to be held on December 6th in the great hall of the hospital (or the old college). The colonel is probably taking advantage of the fact that we're billeted in such a place to organize events like those for the soldiers.

In fact the entire event is organized to celebrate the traditional arrival of Saint Nicolas (*Sinterklaas* for the Dutch). He came into the room with his little helper *Zwarte Piet* (literally *Black Peter*); a little guy whose face is painted black and is supposed to help Saint Nicolas with his duties; he can tell which children have been good and get presents and which have been bad and keep them away.

During the celebration, some women who worked in the kitchen asked that one of the stretcher bearers who worked with us dance, because he had the reputation of being good at it. What they didn't realise was that he wasn't in the room but his brother, who also worked with us, was. When the master of ceremonies called out the name, the wrong brother got up and the women were surprised… and disappointed. It's a good thing they didn't want to see me dance. That's all I'm going to say.

It looks like the Germans invented a flying bomb, the V-1. It's a sort of small plane with no pilot, but a large explosive charge with just enough fuel to get to its target and falls from the sky once the gas runs out. Since there is no pilot it's not very precise, but the damage it causes is considerable. The command is concerned that we might get injured or killed, so they forbid us to go in the areas where they think it might be aimed.

A V-1 rocket on its launching ramp.

A V-1 rocket falling from the sky.

We were informed on December 10th that Lieutenant-Colonel Loree is going back to Canada because his father is very ill. Good for him, but I'm sure if one our parents were to take ill, even very ill, we couldn't go back home and would just have to wait here for any news. Lieutenant-Colonel Merritt will replace him: whatever, him or any other…

Finally, here as everywhere else, it's Christmas. But today is different because the officers are serving the meal and are even on guard duty instead of us. Also as planned, we got our extra rations of rum; some of the guys were feeling no pain after the celebration.

The anti-aircraft guns woke us up on the morning of the 27th as they were trying to shoot down some V-1 rockets flying above Nijmegen. Unfortunately we missed them and the flying bombs went on to their intended targets.

Well, another year went by and we're now in 1945. And, just for New Year's Day a new captain arrived to command our division: *Capitaine Bédard*, a French-Canadian. It's very rare that a French-Canadian gets to that rank!

During the first week of January three or four of the stretcher bearers of our unit took advantage of the offer to take a Nursing Orderly's course, if they're successful this could increase their pay by 25 cents a day.

It's been raining nearly every day since New Year's. That affects the transport of wounded in the ambulances since the muddy roads are impassable, so we use the jeeps. It's not as practical and less comfortable than the ambulances, but we have to make do.

Also, as a precaution against enemy parachutists infiltrating our camp, the command insists that those who leave know the password, which changes every day, and of course that the guards know it too. It hardly matters to me since I hardly leave the compound and I'm rarely on guard duty lately.

We were also told that we're using too much hot water when we take a shower. Of course it's much more comfortable to take a hot shower than the cold one we have when we're in the field or even the baths we take in the rivers, but since we were here we had gotten use to the luxury: not any more.

Some guys still haven't grasped the idea about the black-outs we live with. We were reminded again that we have to turn off any lights that can be seen outside. The light bulbs were removed from the ceiling lamps in the hallways and we were warned that the corporal could very well remove them in our rooms if we're not more careful. In fact, we can't even light a cigarette when we're outside at night!

Around the end of the first week of February, A Company was moved to just outside of Nijmegen to the little village of Beek. I was part of a group that set up a Casualty Collection Point. We got there in the evening and installed our equipment in a small house just below a little hill. I was part of the group that slept in the upstairs rooms.

When we got up in the morning, everything seemed quiet, too quiet in fact. But when we went downstairs we realized why there was no sound coming from there: there was three feet of water everywhere. Le Germans had blown up a dike during the night and since most of the plains in Holland are below sea level they were flooded.

The guys who had slept downstairs were woken up by the rising water but had not warned those of us who were upstairs. We had to walk all the way up the hill to set up our camp in another house higher up.

We were also reminded lately of the discipline of the hours we have to keep. Reveille is at 7 in the morning, breakfast at 7:45, lunch at noon, and dinner at 5 in the afternoon. The soldier who has to wake up the cook and the orderlies who look after the officers has to wake up well before.

In the first week of February, the Germans continued to shell the Allied position in the cities and villages near the front. One morning we were told to avoid one of the neighbourhoods of the city because one of the bombs had not detonated when it fell and the Canadian Army engineers would have to try to do a controlled explosion. It kept us busy for a while and I must admit the noise it made when it went up was startling.

At about the same time we realized that one of the men, a guy called Cormier, who had left on leave to visit his wife and his in-laws in Glasgow, had not come back. I remember him well because we had met in Canada before we all left for England. He was in the Service Corps before D-Day and had asked to be transferred to the Medical Corps once we were in France. Everyone thought he went AWOL during his leave, but finally we learned when we saw him come back a week late that he had been given one extra week's leave because his wife had given birth to a child. On his return he invited me to visit his wife and his in-laws when it was my turn to go on leave. I remembered his wife, having met her once when we were still in England, but I don't think I know her well enough to visit her all by myself.

The Troops Continue
Their March Towards Germany

We've reached the middle of February and our company is now near the town of Cleves where we've settled in a school because setting up a dressing station in a field somewhere is not really possible in this weather; winters here are damp and muddy. One week later I found my name came up for two-week's leave, so I left with about ten other guys. Some are going to Pairs, some to London; I'm going to Glasgow.

I headed to Antwerp and took a ship to England with a bunch of other soldiers. Some, like me, were on leave, others were lightly wounded and going there for a rest, and still others were going back home to Canada because they were too badly hurt.

Crossing the Channel in winter is never pleasant because the weather is stormy and the sea choppy. The ship is not very big and the passengers sometimes get tossed about. A bit after we left the port I decided to get some fresh air on the ship's deck and where I ended up the wind was gusting towards us and there was a row of men hanging on to the railing, so sea-sick they were green and throwing up even if their stomach was already empty. The bunch of Einsteins were set up so the wind blew their vomit back in their faces. I wasn't staying there, that's for sure. I crossed to the other side where the wind was blowing the spray away, and wouldn't you know it, no one there was sick.

We finally docked in a port near London where I took the train for Glasgow. Once there as usual I went to the Overseas Club; I've already mentioned that place. A former private gentlemen's club for rich men of the city converted into a hostel for soldiers. There's also one for the officers and other ones for Americans.

The people who run this club organize activities for us, like inviting us to people's houses for dinner or to spend the evening. On one occasion a man showed me a tunnel in the basement that lead to the theatre next door and offered me a seat in the middle of a row near the front; it really was too bad I understood next to nothing since the play was in English.

On my return to the camp, after my two-week's leave, I learned that Major Willis, whom I had known as the captain who lead the B Division, had died on March 3rd; the jeep in which he was travelling was hit by a German shell. It is too bad he died of course, and I feel bad for his family (I'm don't know if he was married), but he went the way he had always lived, taking many risks.

Spring is slowly coming, and the weather is less damp so the roads and fields are a little dryer, but many are still too muddy and wet for us to set up a field ambulance in tents. It's also difficult to find buildings in good enough condition. As I was saying, we follow the infantry that is fighting the Germans, so there are not many structures standing once they pass through any area.

In March, our command was getting ready follow the 9th Brigade across the Rhine, a large enough river but not as large as the St. Lawrence. The sergeant-major had a hard time finding vehicles, some amphibious, that could transport the men and the stretchers; it seems complicated. I was among those in the convoy who crossed the river on March 26th. We were in the trucks and we drove on pontoons built by the Canadian Army Engineers. All the bridges close by had been destroyed by the Germans who were trying to slow us down.

Since we set up our dressing station near Rathshoff we are very busy. We couldn't find a building that was still in good enough shape so we used the trucks and the tents in a field that was not too muddy.

Around the beginning of April we heard that an entire German army had been encircled in the south of Germany. After that, since we follow the 9th Brigade, we just kept moving forward. The roads are very busy so the ambulances full of wounded have the priority, after the officers' staff cars of course. We usually go by fairly quickly, except when we get to bridges; most of them were destroyed so we cross on pontoons. We're kind of getting used to this by now.

Just like in France and after that in Belgium, the population is welcoming, but we still have to be weary; there are collaborators that are not so happy to see us. Not to mention that there could be German soldiers hidden in basements or sheds; sometimes they lie on some roof and try to shoot at us or at civilians passing by on the streets below. I heard of an occurrence lately where some people in the village of Dalfsen found five soldiers hidden somewhere and handed them over to the Allies. Many of those who are happy to be liberated wear orange armbands - orange is the national colour of the Netherlands.

The Allies in Germany

Well, it looks like we're going to cross into Germany in a couple of days, so around the end of April we were reminded of the orders about German population and prisoners:

> "Non-fraternization means having nothing whatsoever to do with German people except the minimum contact required for the execution of military duty.
>
> All acts of fraternization are absolutely forbidden; the following are examples:
> (a) Shaking hands with Germans.
> (b) Permitting children to climb into motor vehicles or to congregate in areas around military premises.
> (c) Associating on familiar terms, especially with women.
> (d) Visiting German houses.
> (e) Drinking with Germans.
> (f) Playing games or sports with them.
> (g) Making or accepting gifts of any sort (even to or from children).
> (h) Attending German dances, entertainments or other social events.
> (i) Accompanying Germans on the streets, in theatres, taverns, hotels, or elsewhere, except on official business.
> (j) Communicating with Germans on any subject except on official business.
>
> THE ABOVE EXAMPLES ARE NOT EXHAUSTIVE.
> Disciplinary action will be taken in all cases of fraternization.
> Examples of Minor Cases
>
> Speaking to women or girls (except in cases of absolute necessity); shaking hands with Germans; small gifts to Germans (including children); permitting children to climb on vehicles or Germans to congregate about military premises.
>
> Examples of Serious Cases
> Associating with women or girls; visiting German homes; drinking with Germans; playing games or sports with them; giving or exchanging gifts (except of the most trivial nature provided for above); attending German dances or other social events;

accompanying Germans on the street, in theatres, taverns, hotels or elsewhere (except on official business); discussions and arguments with Germans especially on politics or on the future of Germany.

NON FRATERNIZATION/DISCIPLINARY ACTION
Further to Part One Orders No 670 d/24 Apr 45 punishments as follows are liable to be meted to persons guilty of fraternization:

OFFICERS will be dealt with as follows:
(a) For the first minor offence by summary trial if officer is of the rank of Major or lower. If of higher rank than major he should be severely rebuked by a superior officer.
(b) For the second minor offence (however trivial) and for all serious offences, by officer of whatever rank by General Court Martial.

OTHER RANKS will be dealt with as follows:
(a) For first and second minor offences summarily. An effective punishment would be forfeiture of pay (subject to soldiers right to elect trial by Field General Court Martial)
Eg. 1st offence ----Forfeiture of from 7 to 14 days pay
2nd offence ---21 to 28 days pay.
(b) For a third offence (however trivial) and for all serious offences, by Field General Court Martial.
No case, however trivial, may be allowed to pass without investigation and, if proved, punishment will be given out."

The command also repeated the order that we should not eat any food from the area because it could be poisoned. Now that we're in Germany it's even more important to be careful because the population here is not welcoming us; we are not liberators but rather invaders. We also have to be particularly careful about booby traps. If we see a tempting object on a desk like beautiful pen, we have to remember it could be a trap.

It's been two days now that we've crossed into Germany, and around May 5th, as we were nearing the village of Leer (in ruins) we started hearing rumours that the Germans have capitulated, or are just about to do so. It might seem surprising, but there was no great expansion of joy, no celebration: no one was in the mood. It was just a day like any other, except that there are next to no casualties, and those that we do treat are more often than not victims of traps or mines the Germans left behind. There are still die-

hard opponents: soldiers or civilians who just can't accept Germany's defeat. So the command warned us not to leave our camp alone or unarmed, and mostly at night.

We were officially told about the signing of the armistice on the evening of May 8th. I found a quiet corner somewhere and started to write the longest letter I've ever written; it must have been ten or even twelve pages long. I could finally tell my parents just what I had been through for nearly a year now.

Around that time, our division reached the area of Aurich. The captain installed us in a rather large house that hadn't been too badly damaged by the fighting; some of the roof tiles above the kitchen had fallen, leaving a gaping hole in the roof. Luckily the bombs and shells had not set the whole structure on fire. I managed to find a ladder hanging on a fence in the backyard and used it to climb on the roof to do some makeshift repairs. Unfortunately, as I was climbing, some of the rungs broke under my weight, but I still managed to climb, stepping the edge of the rungs. More of them broke as I was climbing down. I just hung what was left of the ladder where I had found it.

We returned to Holland in the region of Appledoorn around the middle of May. We are no longer in a tent in the middle of field or in an orchard; the lieutenant-colonel managed to find a building in good enough condition. We also don't have much to do, we can visit the village, even if we still have to be careful about hidden fighters. Even the die-hards stay hidden or finally accepted the situation, but still we never know.

It also looks like the command has a hard time to make the guys understand that contracting a venereal disease is serious stuff; this is the third warning I've seen, and yesterday we were told that those who catch a disease won't be repatriated to Canada until they are completely cured. We can well imagine that the Army has enough problems with the population seeing maimed soldiers coming home, they don't want a whole bunch of guys coming back with that kind of a disease.

At the beginning of May, I wrote dad that I volunteered for the Canadian Forces in the Far-East to combat against the Japanese with the American Forces. I explained that those who volunteer will be the first to leave for Canada, and that I reckon the Japanese have already pretty much lost the war.

We hear nearly every week about some island or other the Americans have taken from them. Even Tokyo, their capital, was so severely damaged by bombings in March, it was pretty much destroyed all together; apparently

more than 80,000 people died. We're in June now, before the first Canadian soldiers even leave from Europe it'll probably be another month. Then we get one month's leave before we go to the United States where we'll get another month's training, and only then will we be sent all the way across the Pacific Ocean; and I don't think that will be very fast either. I'm pretty sure that by then the Japanese will have capitulated also.

In his letter, dad told me he didn't agree with me, but that he respected my judgement. Actually he's not the only one who didn't agree with me. Most of the guys in my unit couldn't get over it, "Are you nuts? You didn't have enough of this?" they told me. But, they will have to wait their turn to get shipped back home, and that may take a long time, especially for those who caught a disease.

Before I left the camp in Holland one of the soldiers I knew well, Yvan Clermont, asked me to deliver a parcel to his parents in Montreal. Since he's not a volunteer for the Pacific theatre of operations (Japan) he really has no idea when he'll be going home.

Going Home

In the meantime, I left the camp in Holland with other volunteers for a camp in France. Before we left, some officers told us to travel with as little baggage as possible since we might be coming back by plane. If I'd known just how remote that possibility was I would have ignored their suggestion and kept many things I gave away, such as a pair of binoculars for example.

I spent one week in that camp in France before we were all transferred to England. I ended up in Aldershot, yup, Aldershot again. Since we really had nothing to do, we were all given a week's leave. I went to Glasgow. When we came back, we still had nothing to do and were given a week's advance pay and another week's leave: you guessed it, I went back to Glasgow.

Finally, on July 4th, we all left Aldershot for Glasgow one last time where we boarded the Queen Mary for our return crossing to America. The ship was waiting in the basin of the port of Greenock. We were shuttled to the ship just like we did when we left New York. There were so many soldiers on board that we had to sleep in shifts. The guy I was supposed to share my cot with didn't seem very happy at the thought so I found other places to sleep; usually on the covered Promenade Deck along the ship. It really didn't matter; we were coming home and were so happy, not much bothered us.

Once on board, we were all rather excited at the thought we were heading home, but we finally did go to sleep. Sometime in the middle of the night the captain gave the order to weigh anchor and I didn't notice the coast of Scotland disappear in the mist; I woke up to the high seas.

The Queen Mary entering New York harbour with a complement of troops returning from Europe.

The crossing lasted seven days. On the morning of July 11th, we could make out New York City's skyscrapers on the horizon, and gradually, slowly, we approached. This time we docked right at the pier and the command informed us that we could take a week's leave to visit the city, or go anywhere in the country for that matter. But personally, I thought I would just go home and surprise my family by coming home unannounced. Even though I wasn't going back to the same house I had left in 1942, since they had moved from Casselman to Orléans.

Well anyway, a few hours after we left the ship, we boarded the train in the port and we were on our way. About half-way to Ottawa some officers explained the arrival procedure once we got to our destination. Our families and friends had been advised we were coming and would be waiting for us in the Grand Stand of Lansdowne Park. So much for my surprise…

As we left New York, the guys got as comfortable as possible during the long train ride ahead of us, some nodded off. But as the train was getting nearer to its final destination the reality of our reunion with our friends and families was starting to dawn on us; after all the years of dangers and privations we were going home! As we got closer and started to recognize some the scenery and villages I don't think any of us were making coherent sentences.

Finally the train stopped at the New York Central Station on Mann Avenue in Ottawa where my adventure had started nearly two years ago, we boarded the waiting buses that drove us to the Lansdowne Park football stadium, just as they explained to us earlier. The bleachers were filled with our waiting families and friends. After the parade we dispersed and found the posts with big letters corresponding to the first letter of our name; I found the F post since my name is Farley. The people in the stands were so excited to greet their son, their husband, their brother, their cousin, or their friend who they had not seen for so long, that there was a rush to reach the field. Some (the younger ones of course), by-passed the steps and jumped the ten-foot drop to the ground.

Of course, I wasn't the only guy whose name started with the letter 'F', so there was quite a crowd around that post. But finally I spotted Pâquerette, my brother Gérard's wife, then, all the others who had come to greet me: mom, dad, my sister Cécile, my brothers Richard, René, Jean-Guy and Gérard whose car all of them had piled into for the drive from Orléans. There was Laurent also who had taken the Colonial bus and then the streetcar to Lansdowne Park. Carmen and Berthe were also there. Fernand and Rhéal couldn't be there since they were still stationed too far from Ottawa, and Rita was still in Casselman at *ma tante Aurore's* place.

Everywhere around us there was a big celebration. While we were at the front, all of us had lived dangerous moments, that's for sure, but most often we were just busy doing our duties, sometimes even bored. For the people we had left behind however, I suppose we were always in danger. We could see the relief in their eyes.

I also recall seeing an older women, the mother of a guy named Fortier who was looking in vain for her son around our post. I explained to her that when we got off the ship we had been offered a week's leave to visit

and that perhaps her son had stayed in New York rather than take the train with the rest of us. I'll always remember that sad and disappointed look in her eyes: the profound sadness of that moment for her in that crowd that was so deliriously happy.

After a while my name was called to go get my month's leave papers and we left for the house in Orléans. Mom, Dad, the younger ones and I piled in Gérard's car, while Laurent, Berthe and Carmen took the bus back home. When we got there I saw a huge "Welcome Home" banner in front of the house. Then the party started, it was like a New Year's Day celebration or a wedding party; there was music, we sang, we danced, we also had a bit to drink. Everyone was so happy.

The following week I took a train to Montreal to visit Yvan Clermont's family and deliver that package as he had asked me to.

The Discharge

During that month's vacation the Army had awarded us I visited Berthe, Carmen and Richard while they were working at Saint-Vincent Hospital. There I also met one my sisters' friend: Jeannette. I found her rather attractive. There was also Yolande Séguin who my brother Richard thought was the cat's meow.

At the end of my leave, on August 12th, I took a Colonial bus into Ottawa to report to the military barracks at Lansdowne Park. When the bus got to the city and I was waiting for the streetcar on Bank Street, I noticed that the streets were full of discarded paper and other garbage and wondered what had happened, but it wasn't too long before I understood.

The Americans had dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. The first on Hiroshima, on August 6th, and the second one on Nakasaki, on the 9th. A few days later, on the 11th, the USSR declared war on Japan in spite of their non-aggression treaty signed years earlier. That very day, Japan surrendered and the war in Asia was over, and by the looks of it people in Ottawa had celebrated quite a bit at the news. In Orléans we had not heard about the events yet. I don't want to crow, but in the end, I had been right to volunteer for the war in Asia.

But in the meantime, I was still a soldier in the Canadian Army and my leave was over. I reported to the military camp at Lansdowne Park and the guy I spoke to told me to keep busy during the day and that I could go home at night. That situation lasted for a few weeks until someone realized I

should be at the Kingston military camp. Luckily nobody faulted me for the error, and I just left for Kingston.

But we had not much to do their either. We were given leave on weekends to go home. The months of September and October went by and finally on October 30th I was discharged like most of the other soldiers. Personally, I would have really liked to stay on, I liked the army life, I had always dreamed of being a soldier and even after living through a war I still liked it.

I never thought to ask to stay; maybe I should have since I liked the life. I am aware that some did stay on; not many, but some did. Maybe those who did had qualifications that made the command offer them positions, or maybe they just thought of asking. I don't know.

Well now it's neither here nor there, another life is waiting for me tomorrow. I managed to stay alive when so many died or were maimed, crossing an ocean, with the 23rd Field Ambulance, following the 9th Infantry Brigade across a good part of France, Belgium, Holland and into Germany, I'm sure now nothing can stop me. What God sends my way, I'll face that too. One thing I can say for sure, with my family around me to help, it's going to much easier.