

CUS417/21.18

Sunday 10.30 p.m. (Oct. 29, 1916)

Dear Muz:

Am writing again as I am in bed and comfortable after a bath in my canvas bucket and my servant has brought me an oil can full of red hot coals.

Our Thursday night trip was devilish. We started after lunch with twelve wagons, each with six mules and reached our first dump just after dusk. The second dump to which neither I nor the sergeant had the least idea to find the way, proved to be eight or nine miles away and we did not get to the vicinity of it till nine o'clock. To make matters worse my horse went lame and would not be ridden, and the two mules which were so dead tired (they have had no rest or grooming for two weeks) began to lie down in the road in sheer fatigue. I took my servant's horse and went off in search of the dump, inquiring at two battery wagon lines and the advanced dressing station of the field ambulance, but to no avail, and at 11.30 we gave up and I left my horse with the field amb. and the wagons with a sergeant to guard them by the road-side and slowly we walked our way home with the teams. At day-break on Friday we started again and arrived at the wagons in good time and found our way after a couple of hours of hard work to the dump. The mules were absolutely exhausted and we had to go for the assistance of some battery horses to pull us up the hill. The dump, which consists of a dug-out and a pile of ammunition boxes, is on the side of a path which the engineers have built across the old battle-field. On either side yawn the great shell holes and the old trenches, which half filled with mud as they are, mean certain death for a mule and certain destruction for a wagon. All around and in the remains of a wood are the batteries, which were making a most infernal to-do when we arrived. The guns are so beauti-



fully concealed one can scarcely detect their presence till right on them. It took two and a half hours to unload the wagons and to get them turned round and then an hour to get to a place where we could water the mules and feed them, and by the time we were home it was late in the evening. Yesterday was nearly as bad, and this morning I had another journey with 20 wagonloads of ammunition to dispose of.

I don't believe anything has impressed me more than the desolation of the shelled area of this front. For miles the ground stretches without interruption, all broken and turned up, with great yawning holes wherever you turn, the trees all blasted and blackened and the villages some of them with a few bricks left, and others without the least sign of their former existence. The whole scene, combined with the continual uproar and wreckage of habitation that lies all around in the shape of old clothes, pots and pans, old helmets, dead horses, and crosses, with an occasional rifle laid by their sides, inspires the novice at war like myself with something more than horror, more akin to a state of complete depression. I never have seen anything more gloomy. Thank goodness we are out of sight of it here.

Goodnight, my only candle is nearly burnt out and an old mule that has got loose seems to be playing the destructive German with my bivouac, by scrubbing himself against it.

Much love.

E. R. O.