

FROM H. J. WAIN
IN FRANCE. 1917

Hoping to be on the SPREE at an early date
Thursday 30 Aug 17

My dear Mr Robinson,

I was extremely pleased to receive your interesting & welcome letter. I had already accounted for your silence, as I know how extremely busy you must be, especially in the rush connected with the Cambridge Locals & the Term Exams. In addition you have had, practically single handed, the formation & organization of the cadet corps to undertake, and from what I hear & from what I read in the local papers, it has been a remarkable success. No doubt the holiday was very opportune and I trust proved beneficial. As a matter of fact I'm doing the thing in style, "touring on the Continent", (at the Government's expense too!), and it's one perpetual holiday out here! Still a little rest in a peaceful country village would be acceptable, for one wouldn't have to rush out and remonstrate with a "Jack Johnson" for blowing in the side of one's shelter. It would be nice too, to have a long sleep on a comfortable bed, instead of gazing over No man's Land all night, breakfasting about 6 a.m., and trying to "doss" for three hours or so, on the fire step, sometime during the morning. Still one gets accustomed to these things, & really misses them when they are unnecessary.

A propos of the calling up of various persons or, I can give you one peculiar case. My cousin had his leg amputated at the hip, through a train accident, a few years ago. He has been called up three times, notwithstanding he is on Government work, and he was called up for Medical re-examination a few weeks ago. After the examination they kept his papers and said he would be notified in due course. Three weeks later he was told he was "finally rejected". The ways of the Army are many and intricate! Another year of war! Personally, when asked I give it about eighteen years yet (1935). As you know the Scots are reputed to be more or less gloomy, but when I start to talk about eighteen years, even the most pessimistic of them is beaten.

Well now for my own experiences. When I wrote you last I was on a Musketry course at a picturesque French village. I had a very good time there, close by was a large town to which I procured frequent half day passes. Unfortunately while there I developed a poisoned finger, caused by trench dirt I fancy. I was walking down — one day a French lady stopped me, looking at my bandaged hand. "Pardon! M. sien, blessé?" When I replied "Oui Madame" she said "Pauvre enfant, la guerre, c'est terrible n'est-ce pas?" !!

The officer in charge of our party was a rare specimen, a Scot with a sense of humour! The day we left, we started at 4-0 am to march six miles to the station in the early morning. The previous day he asked any man who was unable to march so far, to fall out & give his name to the N.C.O. After that he remarked "You fellows will start at 2-0 am and we will overtake you on the road." Lollapsoe of "peeverers" (a Scot's term for malingerers!). When we first arrived he came round to us and remarked "The Commandant here is an old soldier with a bad temper & a wooden leg he is a penny tin, button polish and a penny tin of Dublin for your boots. Clean yourselves but don't waste these things, in fact you had better return what is left." As there were exactly forty of us, his remarks will be appreciated! Anyway we created a record for the school in scoring points & did very well. I was considerably handicapped, but I managed to come out second, so I did well.

On my return I had to "go pick". For two months, off & on I was kept busy with this finger. From a "gathering", it developed into a septic finger, then it was I.C.T. (inflammation of the cellular tissues) & finally the doctor labelled it "Onychia" & sent me to hospital.