

Glenbow Archives
M-7484-4, Hugh Murray McQueen's First World War letters

[on letterhead: Office of Jarecki Manufacturing Co.]
[envelope postmark: Pittsburgh, PA Aug 9 10-AM 1915.]

Monday AM. 191[5]

Dear Dad:

Suppose you are just about able to be around again from the reports I've had from Mother.

I was working on Mr. Kelley's car all last week + I expect I'll leave at the end of this week + go back + enlist.

Suppose you + that nurse of yours are the very best of friends. I guess I don't know her, Dad, but give her my best regards anyway.

Love to all.
Murray

[postcard of City Hall and Nelson Monument, Montreal.]
[postmark: Montreal, P.Q. Apr 22 2.30 PM 1916.]

Written on the train, Mother, nearly to Montreal. Everything fine. Having the time of my life. Dad + I had quite a little scrap with the home guards last night.

Love to all.
Murray

[postcard of Royal Victoria College, Sherbrooke St, Montreal.]

Sunday, April 23rd / 16
7.10 AM

At Campbellton N.B. just had breakfast. getting along fine.

Love to all.
Murray
Easter Sunday

[postcard of High Street, Rugby, England.]
[ca. May 1916]

Arrived safely, fine voyage. just a second in Rugby so sending this

Love
Murray

Monday May 15th/16

Dear Mother:

Hope you got my cards alright; the last one I sent - from Rugby - shouldn't have been sent because we weren't supposed to have sent any messages whatever for four days after we got here.

We landed in Halifax late on Sunday night + got aboard the steamer Lapland Monday afternoon Monday night we left the dock + anchored out in the bay until Wednesday afternoon. There were two other troop ships with us - the Metagama + the Empress of Britain + ahead of us was a British Cruiser. - the four boats in a line + only three or four hundred yards from each other all the way over. About 24 hours off the Irish coast we were met by four torpedo-boats one for each of the convoy + came into Liverpool around the north of Ireland with a little Torpedo boat cutting circles around our boat all the time - watching for submarines. The destroyers are just little wee boats but they can go like lightning + when they were coming to meet us, all we could see was two sheets of spray + they would seem to disappear altogether under each wave.

We had an exceptionally smooth trip all the way across. Some of the fellows were pretty sick but it didn't effect me in the least except a queer feeling in my head for the first few hours, which everybody had. We got into Liverpool Friday morning making twelve or thirteen days on the boat altogether. On arriving in Liverpool we were given what was called rations for twenty four hours but which was good for about two hours in reality + then we were put on those funny little trains. Little wee cars divided into compartments each compartment held eight of us quite comfortably you step right off the platform of the station into the compartments + can't get from one part to another except at stations. But maybe those little trains can't go, mother, + over the finest roadbeds I ever saw. We left liverpool about 9 o'clock A.M. + passed the outskirts of London + got to Shorncliffe about 4 P.M.

Awfully pretty country, Mother, fields all divided by hedges + everything as green as could be. But the climate is awful Fog + rain all the time. Only a couple of nice days since we got here. We are just in a temporary camp now, under canvass + our lines are about a foot deep with mud. but we will be moved into huts any time + they really are the finest camps possible. Each hut with a foundation + lined with asbestos board. All the lines paved, hot + cold baths Etc. Etc. Each hut reminds me for all the world of a summer cottage at the Lake.

Shorncliffe + Folkestone, right here together + among the best seaside resorts in England. On a clear day France can be seen from anywhere along the promenades.

Well, Mother, Dress for Parade has gone + I must hike. I'm writing this in the dry canteen (we have both wet + dry here). Had an inspection by General Steele this morning + he complimented us all round. He asked me, on passing me how our equipment was, I said, very uncomfortable Sir. He said it would be changed before long.

Love to all Mother.
Murray

[P.S.] Write to
Pte. M. McQueen
#124756
70th O.S. Battn C.E.F.
War Office
London
Eng

[postcard of a public house, Folkestone, England.]
[postmark: Folkestone 4.15 PM 20 May 1916.]

These are all over the country just as Charlie Dickens talks about. Awfully pretty and interesting - to some, but a decent meal can't be bought

Murray

[letter written on booklet of Folkestone postcards]

Folkestone,
Saturday A.M. May 20th 1916.

Dear Jeanie:

Received a letter from you, a couple from Mother + a couple from Dad, also a couple of Petrolea papers last night. You should have seen the fellows crowd around when those papers came, even Major Fairbank came over. We are having some beautiful days here now (I touch wood) + England certainly is pretty when the sun is shining.

So Mack is on the farm. Pretty lucky for him to get partial Matric that way + I'll bet he's one that realizes it.

We are really soldiering over here, Jean, something that we didn't know how to do before. From 5.30 in the morning until 5 at night, so we are all always ready for bed at 9.30 PM. But I am getting fat, brown as an Indian + never felt better in my life.

Two hundred (194 + myself) have been chosen from the Battn and are now taking a musketry course. Grover Crosbie came out of the trenches last Sunday Morning + I was talking to him Monday Morning. His bullet wound in the arm is all healed and he has been back in the trenches six weeks since coming out of the hospital. Looks fairly well, tho, pale + thin. I suppose Mother had my letter about the trip before now

Love to you all
Smilie[?]

[P.S.] Yours + Mothers snaps are fine. Send lots. Murray

[Western Union Telegram]

Received at
M34MO 1A 57 N L

Riverduloup Stn Q June 16 17 1916

Mrs G O Fairbanks

S S Phila sailing Saturday noon NewYork Sincere wishes for a safe and happy voyage and safe return with your husband tell him God bless him and all the boys we will look after the kiddies like our own will take care of business as usual tell Murray with our love he is the whole army to us Love to you and Mrs Carling

A M McQueen
257 AM

Saturday June 17/16

Dear Dad:

Leaving for France this morning with 2nd draft. Colonel Towers said he would wire you that we are leaving. First draft left a week + a half ago but I missed it on account of being on pass. We are reinforcing the 58th Battalion which, I think, is in the 3rd division. Ten Petrolea boys on this draft Two Sharkeys, Mandeville, Fred Douglas, Bill Balls, Jack Hall Clare Russell, Jack Griffin + Alf Harper. Smythe is on it also. Dunc is staying here as a Musketry instructor. We will

probably be in the trenches before you get this but not at all certain. They may keep us at the base for awhile.

Brigadier said yesterday it really is one of the best drafts he ever inspected

I have been at the Hythe ranges all week as a coach on the firing line

My love to all, Dad.
Murray.

P.S. Tell Jean Cameron I rec'd her letter + will answer it from France but for her to write often in the meantime. I hope Jean (ours) got my cards + letter.

[on letterhead: Y. M. C. A. On Active Service with the British Expeditionary Force]

July 1st. 1916

Dear Mother:

We are having the finest little July 1st celebration we've ever had; also a little different. Since we came over from England two weeks ago we have been about four miles behind the lines and working pretty hard. But even back there it is rather exciting. Almost any time during daylight we could look up + see the shells from anti-aircraft guns bursting around ours + Fritz's planes. According to the great number of shells used on an aeroplane when it is up, Mother, one would wonder how it could come through without being wrecked; but in two weeks here + seeing them fired on all the time, we've only seen one come down, one of Fritz's, + it lit only about 400 yards from our camp. One of the shrapnel bullets which brought it down, passed a bunch of us who were watching + went through the orderly room window table + floor.

Last night, about dusk, we left camp +, the whole battalion in single file, arrived here at the dug-outs about 11.30 P.M. To-day, Mother, we are sure hearing what we all enlisted to hear and all the time, too.

At the present time Hughie Sharkey + Smitty (Smyth) are lying asleep while Baldy McEachern, from Alvinston, Vern Mandeville + Clair Sharkey are playing cards. Of course everyone here has to wear a shrapnel helmet + we look, for all the world like a bunch of Burma-Indians.

I wish I could tell you the names of places around here + exactly where we are but I have written once before since we got here + had it returned.

Received yours + Mac's letters yesterday, Mother + have been reading them every now + then ever since. I certainly wish my habits in correspondence were better so I would receive more letters.

I'm just as glad I took off my officer's uniform + came as a private, Mother, because I'd rather have experience here before assuming the responsibility an officer has.

Didn't I mention before having received Marg's letter. I certainly meant to + I think I sent her a card.

Tell Marg, + everyone to write me as often as they have time whether they receive an answer at once or not because I appreciate them a whole lot + will write whenever I can. Also tell Jean Cameron the same thing, Mother, because I received a awfully nice letter from her which I have not answered yet.

Love to all of you
Murray

#124756
B. Co. 58th Battn.
France

Field Service Post Card

Miss Margaret McQueen
Petrolia Ontario Can

I am quite well.

I have received no letter from you for a long time.

Murray
[July?] 1st 1916

Field Service Post Card

Mrs A. M. McQueen
Petrolea Ont. Can.

I am quite well.

I have received your parcel July 9th

Letter follows at first opportunity.

I have received no letter from you lately.

Murray McQueen
[July?] 21st 1916

July 24th 1916.
In Belgium. 3.30 PM.

Dear Dad:

Just got back to the camp we are now in, yesterday after eight days Brigade rest back in a little town in France, about eighteen miles from the firing line.

We were on what is called Brigade rest but I really think we worked harder back there than we have since we began soldiering. Oh: a fellow has to soldier with a vengeance alright, over here. Especially a buck private in the rear rank. Nevertheless, I had the monotony relieved for a couple of days back there - had charge of the platoon for a couple of days while the N.C.O's were on courses + light-duty. You see, Dad, the 58th is very short of officers + most of the platoons are in charge of N.C.O's.

We saw all the old Petrolia boys while we were away. Wallace Reid, Hugh Riddell, Clarence Duncan, Bury Hall, Alf Johnston, George Lucas, George Stirritt Etc. Etc. + Believe me, Dad, everyone of them looks better than he ever looked before. Of course all the mounted rifle boys + Wallace Reid also, have practically a bomb-proof job. They never see the line except on working-parties at nights + only occasionally at that even. However, their time is coming when we once get Fritz on the move.

I think, in peace time, these countries would be very interesting + beautiful. Smooth, hard, winding roads. Most of them completely shaded by large trees, fine crops of grain + acres + acres of hop-fields.

We expect to go up the line again to-morrow + I hope we are as lucky as we were our last trip in - only a few casualties However we'll be out again, probably before you get this letter. I received your letter from N.B. Dad. I think I know the fellow you mentioned as being transferred to the 70th as an instructor. That's the kind of a bomb-proof that Dunc McDermid has. I was offered it in England myself - even had a hard time getting out of it - but I enlisted to come over here + I'm here. Harold Miol, Bob Chambers + Bud Kavanaugh got over a couple of days ago but I haven't seen them yet.

Received Mac's letter. Don't let Marg. + Jean forget me altogether Dad.

I am putting a note in this to Mother also

I could make these letters very interesting, I think, if I could tell you just where we are + how we got here Etc.

Well, Dad, My very very best love to all at our house + quite a bunch over at Cameron's house.

Murray

P.S. Did you send a picture to Mildred O'Ferrall. 744 Brooklyn Ave. Detroit

[on letterhead: Y. M. C. A. On Active Service with the British Expeditionary Force]

Monday Aug. 7/16.

Dear Mother:

Rec'd the photos this morning. They are great. I'm awfully glad you sent them because all I had before was a small snap of you. That bunch of snaps I brot with me are in England with some other stuff of mine. You see we carry no kit bag over here. All we carry is a gas-helmet (slung in a small carrier over our shoulder), a shrapnel helmet; in the haversack on my equipment is writing paper + toilet articles (razor + tooth brush) + in my pack on my back is my overcoat + one extra pair of socks. No extra underwear or a thing. Of course our rifle is carried every step we take.

We came out of the front line trenches Saturday after eight days in - the general rule is four days in.

We are still doing working-parties, from a short distance back, at nights but to-night is the last + we'll be back for a rest for probably 16 days.

Rec'd your letter + one from Dad while in the trenches, Mother. It seemed funny - about two hours before I got your letter I had written to Mr. Shaver in Pittsburgh + then you told me about Mr Kelly taking back my photo.

How is Dad's side, Mother? He was in Toronto about it when he wrote to me.

I'm sending a "Fragments from France" skit that I got from a magazine, which is the truest thing to life that I've seen yet - I laugh every time I look at it. The expression on his face in the second part is almost as good as "I frowed up". Also sending a picture that Clair Sharkey handed me as looking an awful lot like you. I think it does too.

I had a nice parcel of candies from Aunt Kate McSean the day we went into the trenches + a letter while we were in. I've only had time to send her a "Whizz-bang" (field service post card) since but will write her a letter.

I suppose Mac's farming is over by now. Of course he'll be sore about it (?) - like we, out here, would if peace was declared.

I'll close, Mother, with love to you all.

Murray

[P.S.] Forgot to mention - we have Capt. Gray + Capt. Humphries with us from the 70th. Just came yesterday. I was speaking for a minute to Capt. Gray this morning. He was telling me about a louse he found in his bed last night. But when I told him that we "crumb up" every day + that this morning I captured about 50 on my shirt he realized that he still had something coming to him. Its a real war picture to see a bunch of men sitting on the grass with shirts off + inside out, making a general raid on the "wee beasties"

Murray

[page 153 of The Bystander, July 26, 1916]

More "Fragments from France"

My Hat!

That tin hat feels something like this on the way to the offensive

[cartoon of soldier wearing a very large helmet]

And about like this when you get there

[cartoon of soldier wearing a very small helmet]

Helmets, Shrapnel, One by Captain Bruce Bairnsfather

Field Service Post Card

Mrs. A. M McQueen

~~Petrolia~~ Ontario 1410 Ridgeway Fort William Ontario Canada

I am quite well.

I have received your letter [and] parcel

Letter follows at first opportunity.

Murray

Sept 4th 1916

Field Service Post Card

Mrs A. M. McQueen
Petrolea Ontario Canada

[in pencil at top of postcard] arrived sept. 30/16

I am quite well.

I have received your letter

Murray McQueen
Sept 16/16

Advice of Admission to [Hospital?]

Mrs. A. M. McQueen
Petrolia Ontario Canada

[in pencil at top of postcard] arrived oct. 3/16

124756 Murray [McQueen?]
B Company
58th Canadians

has been admitted into No. 23 General Hospital

Sick* Bronchitis

[signature of chaplain]

France, Friday Sept 24/16

De[ar Mother?]:

I hope you have been receiving the field cards I have been sending you. We have been kept terribly busy + have been really working so I haven't had an awful lot of time to myself. You will have received my hospital card by this time. Was in the hospital for almost two weeks. Came up to convalescent depot yesterday + was marked for Convalescent camp this morning. Had bronchitis + my side bothering me. However I think a rest should fix my side up - if not I'll have to have a support of some kind. A flat piece of shrapnel slapped it + must have given me a

strain. Very best regards wishes for yours, Margaret's + Mac's birthdays (although a little early for Macs) + many happy returns. Love to all.

Murray.

[P.S.] Thanks for parcel, Mother, also Jean C for pipe + Mrs. C. for socks Also many thanks to Bessie Sears-brook for parcel. Will write to her.

[letter from Jean Cameron to Murray's mother, Mrs. A. M. McQueen]

Petrolia, Ont. Dec. 11 1916

Dear Mrs. McQueen.

I enclose Murray's letter and have kept a copy here for his father. I am so glad to hear of him and thankful that he has not been wounded, but it is simply awful to think he hasn't had any mail for months and I know the poor kid is pretty lonesome and homesick, and I hate to even think of Christmas with poor old Murray in a hospital. I'm going to try + get a letter off to him to-night. The O.W.E. Co. Ltd. address in London is 57. Bishopsgate, London. E. C. As usual, I am in a terrible rush. Perhaps sometime before I'm old I'll have time to write you a decent letter, but just now I don't know when that time will be.

Love to you and all the kids. Hope the colds are better.

Very sincerely
Jean

[Murray's letter enclosed with Jean's letter. On letterhead: Y. M. C. A. On Active Service with the British Expeditionary Force]

Wednesday Oct. 11th 1916.

Dear Dad:

Have received no mail since leaving the battalion. Doubtless they expected me back sooner or it would have been forwarded but bronchitis has left me with a nasty cough but it is improving + I will likely be back before you receive this.

I suppose the Canadian papers have been rather exciting for the past few weeks. Anyway it has been a little (?) exciting out here. Just now I am at an ideal convalescent camp; practically new and situated right along the sea. We are treated fine, eat well + as far as health is concerned it would be hard to find a more suitable place.

Rec'd mother's + the girls photos, Dad but had them in my haversack, which was blown to pieces, so please have Mother send me some more. Hope you + Mac enjoyed your trip West; had a card from Mac from Winnipeg. Love to all at home + if anyone is the least bit offended at me for not writing, tell them that up till just lately I've had the busiest time of my career.

Murray.

(Address over)

Murray McQueen # 124756
58th Bn C.E.F.
c/o Canadian Base France.

P.S. Side still the same but will get some support for it when I get to the base. Murray

Field Service Post Card

Mrs A. M. McQueen
25 Foxbar Rd Toronto Ont

[postmarked Dec 16, 1916]

I have been admitted into hospital

I have received your parcel

Letter follows at first opportunity.

I have received no letter from you for a long time.

Murray [McQ?]

[letter from R. McNally to Murray's mother, Mrs. A. M. McQueen. On letterhead: St. John Ambulance Brigade hospital.]

France Dec. 23rd 16.

My Dear Mrs. MacQueen:

Now this is the way it Happened.

I was taking a Draft up the line from the Base. When we unload at first slip the officer call me by my name and a few minutes later a Boy came up and made himself known - Yes: it was Murray. - probably we were not pleased I had heard so much about him - and have sure got to know him a lot better since. We had Old Petrolia all over the lot that night. - We both dropped out the next day and went to Hospital his side is bothering him some what yet nothing serious but just enough to put him out of action and I am glad it is - because [this?] is Hell in the winter. I am almost sure that he returned to the Base. I was returned to Hospital for my old wound of Oct 1st and Bronchitis. But it is the old wound that troubles Chiefly. Got a bad messing up [illegible?] and hurried I don't know what is wrong but I have lost 26 lbs. and dont feel at all good. How ever there is life in the old Dog yet.

There is not very much I can tell you only that I am sure awful glad to have met that Boy of yours I trust he is great and that you need not worry about him because I don't think that he will be in action for some time.

Season Greetings to you and yours.
Yours very Sincerely

112101 Sargt. R. McNally
4th CMR.
3 Div.

[address on slip of paper included with letter]

Sergeant McNally, #112101,
4th C. M. R.,
Northumberland War Hospital,
Newcastle on the Tyne,