

LETTERS TO HOME

**A Real-Life Account of
World War I
through the Eyes
of a Saskatchewan Soldier**

Introduction

George Barclay was born in Hartney, Manitoba on May 13, 1895. His family moved to Jansen, Saskatchewan in 1908. His younger years were spent working on the family farm and attending Deer Plain School. Like a lot of young boys, he loved to be outside. He loved to hunt and became an excellent shot, a skill that would serve him well during the war years.

At the age of 21, in 1916, George decided that his calling was to represent his country as a soldier overseas during World War I. He enlisted in the Armed Forces in 78th Battalion in Winnipeg, Manitoba, after leaving his family and his "sweetheart", Frances Moore, back home in Jansen.

Although Frances and George were not "officially" engaged when he left for the war, they were very close and missed each other dearly. George wrote letters to Frances every week. Frances lovingly kept the letters she received from him in shoeboxes, stashed neatly away and always making the move with them when they relocated.

The letters stayed with the family throughout the years and became a cherished heirloom. George was not known to be an "affectionate" person, so the love for Frances that he showed in the letters was very subtle. He never wanted the letters to be read by others, as he was a very private man. It was only after his death in 1978 that the family really got the opportunity to view the letters. He had written to Frances on a weekly basis from the time he left Jansen in 1916. There are no letters for the last 18 months of the war, and the family is not sure if he just quit writing, or if the shoebox that held that portion of history was misplaced over the years.

In 2006, Marian Barclay, George's daughter-in-law, compiled excerpts of the letters into the following account. What she wrote is a tribute to her father-in-law, as well as to all the soldiers who fought in the Great War. It portrays the reality of war, but at the same time, the hope for tomorrow and a better world.

It is the hope of the descendants of George Barclay that what he wrote nearly a century ago will help those of us who read it understand what the brave young men of our country sacrificed in order to make our world of today a better place to live.



The Young George Barclay



The Young Frances Moore



**Photo taken in Winnipeg after the Jansen boys signed up
and received their uniforms.
Back L-R: Bill Diamond, Walter Moore, George Russell, Aubrey Wilson
Front L-R: Frank Wilson, Arthur Moore, George Barclay**



**The RMS Empress of Britain -
the Ship on which the “Jansen Boys” left Canada
and journeyed to England in 1916.**

LETTERS TO HOME

Somewhere in France - August 18, 1916

It's been 7 days since George last wrote to Frances from Bramshott, England and he's writing from somewhere in France a few lines before we go to the trenches. I suppose you will be surprised to hear that we are this close to the enemy line, but nevertheless, it's true. We have seen a couple of air fights and can hear the guns going off. We can see the flash of the guns and the shells breaking. We are about 5 or 6 lines behind the first line but we still don't know whether we go to the first line to-night or not. I hardly think so. Our captain told us that we're just going to be 'baptized', so maybe there won't be much danger.

The day before the men had a lesson about gas. George writes We put our helmets and masks on and they sent a waft over us. We could smell it but it wasn't that bad. Then when we were coming back they tried a little of the weeping gas on us and even that little bit made our eyes smart and water.

August 25

The Jansen boys We are back to camp and are all well. We went up behind the front trenches and stayed 24 hours. I was under my first shellfire yesterday. They say it was a light shellfire but it was enough for me. A big shell hit about 100 yds. from me and destroyed a big tree. It scared me worse than I thought it would.

August 31

Just a few lines to let you know that we are still in the land of the living. Well dear, I have been in the trenches and have an idea now what the rest of the boys have gone through these last two years.

At 9:00 am Saturday *our company* we went into the reserve trenches as a working party to dig more trenches about 75 yards from the German trenches. A man who was digging 15 yards from where I was digging got killed. We worked at this about 4 hours and then went back to the reserve line. The next morning we were taken back to the same place to widen a communications trench. The following night we went back to put up a barbed wire fence. Seven men have been either killed or wounded already. The day we came out of the trenches we were shelled by the big guns but no shells came near our group. One working party had to shovel their way out of their trench as a shell struck adjacent to the side of the trench and they were partly buried in mud.

It started to rain when we were part-way to camp and it poured for 24 hours. I pity the poor fellows in the trenches as there must have been a couple of feet of water in them. We got soaked right through and had to sleep as we were.

I have seen rats in the trenches and they are about the size of a cat. When we are in the trenches we have to do our own cooking - we make a little fire and cook our food in our own mess tins.

Our camp is 5 miles behind the front line. Today we can't hear any guns going off. When there is gunfire it only lasts about 1 hour and they are mostly our guns. We fire about 3 times as often as they do. Two miles from the trenches crops are growing.

September 10

George wishes he could sleep for 48 hours. He writes: We have not been in the trenches to hold the line for awhile but have been going in as a working party every night. We have been pushing truck loads of things into the front line. The trucks are small like little railcars and travel on tracks about 2 1/2 feet wide and 1 inch rails. There was a hill about 500 yards long and coming back we got on the cars. You should see us come. We never laughed so much for a long time'. We have two of the best sergeants in the whole battalion. One is a great big fellow and we call him the 'section boss'. *They were young and like to have fun.*

Tonight we go onto the trenches to stay awhile but it's probably safer there than in the working parties.

The Germans sent gas over the other night. We have alarm posts all around and men are posted at each one. They are to ring a bell, pound a piece of iron or whatever as a warning for all the boys to get their masks on. We were about a mile behind the line but the wind wasn't strong enough to cause the gas to drift that far.

Walter received a box from the Nealdale ladies, *a post office in the Eric Neal house between Jansen and LeRoy*, so we went down to help him eat it. My, it was good. Walter intends to send the ladies a thank you note.

We were all surprised to see a YMCA only 1 mile behind the firing line. You can get most anything you need there. They have a piano and a gramophone there and the men are making good use of them. Every night that we were coming home from the work parties at 3:00 or 4:00 AM we would come in there and get all the hot cocoa we could drink - free, and it was a good thing as our pay is not much, about 1 franc a day or \$6.00 per month. We bought cookies to go with our cocoa. Eggs are 5 cents each and a loaf of bread is 18 cents at the YMCA.

September 16

We go out of the trenches on working parties now and five of our men were wounded last week. One was killed. All they could find of him was pieces. A big shell called a ----jar hit him. You can see them coming. He was out with several men and yelled at them to separate. They ran one way and he the other - right into the shell. I did not know him very well but they said that he was a fine fellow.

The battalion on the right of our brigade lost 4 men from trench mortars. They were coming about 25 yards from where we were but all we got was the mud that came down on top of us. You could see them coming. They just seemed to be a streak of red in the air and we tried to judge where they'd land. Then we'd dodge up and down the trench to avoid being hit. *It appears that they had 12 lines of trenches. The front line was 1st trench nearest the Germans and the next line was called the Supports. After a specific time the men would change lines so they all got their turn in every line. That way those farthest from the front could get some sleep. Nearest the front they took turns every hour being on sentry duty.*

I have not had my boots off for 6 days and none of us have had our clothes off since we left England 1 month ago.

Apparently they went directly to the trenches upon their arrival in France.

September 20

I am so sorry to inform you that Walter (*Frances's brother*) got hurt and is now on his way to England. I never saw him at all before he left but someone told me that his injury was not serious. A bullet went through his nose and down his cheek. I heard that the bullet was still there but don't know for sure. He was on sentry at the time that 10 of us were putting up a barbed wire entanglement. Some German sniper saw us as bullets whizzed over the trench every few seconds. We all rolled over the parapet (*mounds of dirt and sandbags placed on the edge of the trench for protection*) and into the trench but the sniper got Walter. *The bullet lodged in his throat and was serious.*

I have now made 2 trips into 'no mans land', last night, the night before and have to go out again tonight to put out more entanglements. We stay out about 3 hours every night and last night, the bullets came over fast enough for my liking. The 2 front lines are only about 100 yards apart.

I was so surprised to see a lot of turnips growing out there. I carried two armfuls out and gave them to the boys in the trenches. They soon ate them up.

September 30

I had a letter written to you but it was given back to me. They told us that the 4th division was telling too much, so I will tell you nothing about what's going on here.

We (the *Jansen boys*) are all well here except for Walter. I got a letter from him about a week ago. He has not had the bullet removed yet but expects them to do so soon. I expect that he has written all about it to you and your folks.

We have just passed through some nice country these last few days obviously (*they are on the march to a different location*). I am sitting in an orchard under an apple tree writing this letter. There are some police watching us or I would toss something up the tree and knock an apple down. While we were marching along the road the other day, one of the sergeants threw his steel helmet up and knocked some apples down. When he tried to do it a 2nd time his helmet stayed there and he had a hard time climbing the tree to get it down.

I have had some good sleeps the last 4 or 5 nights on hay in a hay loft. It was the best bed I've had since I joined the army except for when I visited my Aunt and Uncle in Glasgow.

I hope you've heard good news from Walter. I half expect to hear from him tonight. I will have to close as I can hardly see to write.

October 5

George tells Frances that they are still 'on the move' and that he has had another ride in an 8 ft. x 24 ft. box car- 40 men and there wasn't even comfortable sitting room. We are still in the orchard area full of apple and pear trees. We have eaten some and they taste real fine. He hopes that Walter is OK, but hasn't heard anything since he was to have the bullet removed from his throat.

October 16

We don't get very much time for ourselves. We've been working every night and sleeping during the day. The last few nights we walked 8 miles, worked, then walked 8 miles back. Talk about being tired. I never for a minute thought I could stand so much, and besides we don't get very much to eat. I have also come to the conclusion that if I get out of this war I will be awfully lucky for I have seen some awful sights these past few nights. In a way Walter's injury was hard luck but all of us Jansen boys

think we'd trade places with him if we could. Aubrey Wilson got a slight wound on his head from shrapnel. Frank Wilson just got back from the hospital having had a terrible throat and bad chest. He was there about 3 weeks and says that they can take him back there again whenever they like. I wish it was all over and that we were back home.

November 12

We assume that he has just been in the Battle of Somme, between Ypres and Passchendaele. The war would continue for another full 2 years.

I have done nothing for 8 days. It is the best rest I've had since I came into the Army. I don't feel as mad at everything now as I did in my last letter. I suppose when it is all over we will forget all about it.

He would never talk about the war and never picked up a gun after he got back.

We have been in billets since we came from the fighting in an old barn owned by a friendly farmer. They are threshing with an old treadmill and they must have thought they were really doing something as there were about 100 of us standing around watching them. They seemed pretty good natured but we can't talk French and they can't talk English, so we just can't really communicate.

We would likely be back in the trenches but the weather has been so bad - raining all the time. This place should be called rainy France and not sunny France that I've read about. For the past 3 days I can hear the guns continual bombardment in the distance.

Aubrey Wilson is now home from the hospital and has a slight scar on his forehead. Geo Russell has broken a lot of his teeth eating these hard biscuits we get. I would like to have been at the fowl supper with all of you. It won't be long until Christmas - just 6 weeks. Walter and I will be away this year and last year you were at your sister, Vera's, in N. Dakota. It seems such a long time ago.

November 24

We have just had another turn in the trenches and have just come out. I just got a letter from Walter and he thinks the worst is over and when he is well enough he expects to be sent home. He has suffered enough, poor kid. I wish I was going home with him, but I suppose the longer I stay here the more I'll appreciate home when I get there. I just got some rotten news. We have to go back to the lines tomorrow. I wish I was home. I'll never leave it again.

December 7

We have been on the move this past week and hope we can have it a little easier now for awhile. I have an awful cold and can't sleep at night for coughing. I wish I had some Watkins liniment so I could rub it on my throat and chest then go to sleep for 2 weeks. We are now in billets in a nice French town. I am sleeping in a wash room with 4 others but we have a nice little stove and are warm and comfortable.

December 10

We have left that hole where all the fighting has been. *Where? We think around Passchendaele.* The sights I have seen this while back have been just awful. Frances, pray for this terrible war to end real soon.

This last time we were in the trenches it rained 24 hours before we went in and about 12 hours after we got there. We were up to our knees in mud and water all that while and sat there and shook like leaves for about 48 hours.

Geo Russell has a terrible cold and can hardly speak, and I still have that awful cold and cough.

We are all changed - even the officers. I have seen them put their arms around an injured man and help them to the nearest dressing centre.

Geo Russell has been wounded. We have heard that he was hit by shrapnel in the head but we don't really know for sure.

They have received more parcels from the Neadale and Jansen ladies and have had the biggest feed that we've had for a long time since we've hardly eaten anything for a week. We are still in billets in a nice French town.

I am now in the machine gun section and think that might be a little better.

December 13

Do you know that I feel a little happier tonight than I have for sometime and in better spirits too? It must be because we've had a good rest. It certainly has done us all a world of good. The boys are getting like they used to be, laughing and joking - that is what is left of them. We have just had our 1st snowstorm in France.

December 20

My cold is worse again and I haven't been able to speak above a whisper these last few days. I really don't feel well and the Doctor gave me some pills that are not helping at all. Geo Russell has been in hospital with a bad cold. The weather has been real cold - just like freeze-up with a little snow in Canada. We are lucky boys as we've been in our warm billets for 2 1/2 weeks. I feel sorry for the poor boys in the trenches. We all hope that we won't be in the trenches again this year. The boys all seem to think that peace will come soon but I can't see it.

We all had a bath today. The boys are all a mass of sores from scratching. You can guess the reason, these little animals are simply awful. *He asks again for news of Walter.*

Christmas Day 1916

I'm having a very different Christmas than what I had the last 2 years but I hope that I'm back next year to enjoy it again with all of you and the other Jansen folks.

We have moved from our last comfortable billets and have been in 2 places since then are closer to the front line. We spent Christmas Eve in an old barn. It was a little cold but we had nice new blankets to keep us warm while we slept. We went to bed early and didn't get up till 7:00. Our Christmas morning breakfast was tea, a slice of bread and a little piece of bacon.

After breakfast we marched 4 miles and we were put up in huts. Christmas dinner was a slice of bread, the usual dish of beans, 1/4 lb. of plum pudding and tea. Supper was as usual - a slice of bread, jam and tea. I had your parcel, Frances, and 2 others, so I fared alright. I was really lucky.

My cold is gone finally and I feel fine.

George apologizes for some of his 'out of spirit' letters. He says:

I have had some hardships out there but there are a lot worse off than me. I think that I may have it a little easier now but it may be more dangerous working the machine gun. At least I won't have to go on any more working parties all night. I will only go in the trenches with my battalion and come out with them.

The boys have made a little log fire and we're all sitting around it talking about past Christmases so I will finish this tomorrow.

Boxing Day

I got a letter from Walter who wrote that he'd been very sick with 'la grippe' but I expect you already know that.

This morning we were sitting around our little fire in the hut when one of the boys felt itchy and took off his shirt to investigate the cause. Of course, we all took off our shirts and began looking through them and picking off 'little animals' when the door opened and the Brigadier entered and asked us what unit this was. You should have seen us laugh when he was gone. Everyone here has an idea that peace is on the way but I am sure it will take more time. Just think when this is all over what a good time we'll have. I wish I was home now.

December 29

We are going into the front line trenches so I'm writing today as I will have no chance to write for a couple of weeks. The German line and ours are between 100 and 150 yards apart. We have had one battalion in the line for 4 days and they had 1 killed and 4 wounded. That's quite different from where we had our worst fighting. We lost 20 men inside of 2 hours. There were 55 men in Platoon #9 and 15 of them are left. I must not say anymore about things over here as we must not talk of anything of military importance.

I must hurry to finish this letter as it's getting dark. It gets dark here about 4:00 o'clock now, I suppose about the same as at home. I plan to get a bath and a change of clothes before I leave for the trenches.

This is the end of the letters for 1916.

One can understandably see that Geo is quite depressed as 1917 begins. Many of his friends have been killed, badly injured or are ill. Living conditions are terrible. The men are cold, have lice, and are sick with bad colds, bronchitis, influenza and tuberculosis. They are worked hard, are under terrible stress and are on starvation diets. There is no doubt that the troops are suffering from what we now call Post Traumatic Distress Disorder. The war will not be over for nearly 2 years.

January 7 - 1917

I suppose you will think that I've forgotten about you, but that is not the case. We have been up the line again and have just come out. We are billeted in an old barn loft now and as it's very cold it's difficult to write letters.

I suppose you will soon have Walter back with you all again. I wish this war would hurry up and end so that I would be able to come home too. If I still keep dodging I suppose I will get home after awhile.

I went to a concert last night. I think it was got up by the soldiers and held in the Y.M.C.A. It was pretty good but that does not interest me much any more. I do not think I would go 12 or 15 miles to a school concert or dance anymore as I used to with you at Jansen. I would rather stay in my dugout.

I have made up my mind now what I'm going to do when I get back. I am going out into the bush - get myself some bully beef, some hard biscuits, a few candles and live right there. I ought to have a pretty good time. I won't have to wash dishes, but I will keep my mess tin which doesn't know what it is to get a wash. I'll just have my pocket knife, no fork or spoon just like I have right now. I don't expect you will want to keep house for me then, would you?

January 10

George writes a 14 pager

We are going back into the line to-morrow. We are going in for quite awhile so I won't be able to write you for 3 to 3 weeks.

The days are so short now, just like at home in Canada. It is very cold in our barn or bedroom I should say. If we stay there we have to get between the blankets or freeze.

He tells her about 'our great event yesterday'.

They all had to parade to see the boys of their brigade get their decorations. 9 medals were given out and our Colonel got the D.S.C. (Distinguished Service Cross) for the good work our battalion did since we came to France. We certainly did good work. We went over the top (*out of the trench*) and into the German trench and took some prisoners, but we paid for it with men's lives. When we came here we were about 1000 men and now there are 400 of us left and I helped bury many of them. We did it in daylight as there was such heavy fog that the enemy could not see us. We got another draft of men from Winnipeg yesterday.

The boys congratulated me yesterday when they saw me as they'd heard that I'd been hit. The machine gun I've been using was hit twice but as luck would have it I was not there both times. I had just left for a few minutes each time.

I must tell you about the last time I escaped being killed. A group of us were walking along when they started to shell us. We took shelter in our cook house which was

down in a valley. They kept shelling us for quite awhile then stopped. I decided to go outside and up the side of a little hill to figure out what they were up to. Just then a shell hit the back of the cook house and blew it in. I had sense enough to run a few yards to get out of the way of flying pieces. Six men were in the cook house and three were killed. If I had not gone out just then to take a look I would have been no more. *He tells her not to worry about him as it seems that he's meant to come back to her. 3 times that he has missed being killed.*

January 21

He's just back from another spell in the trenches.

All the boys are getting letters from Canada telling of their folks having 'la grippe'. I'm sorry to hear that its hit you and your people.

It snowed about 3 inches about a week ago and melted just enough to get slippery. We just have leather boots, and I slipped and fell flat on my back and jarred myself real good.

There isn't a Canadian over here that doesn't think that Canada is the only place to live and doesn't wish he was back home.

January 30

Geo Russell is back with them after having been in hospital for at least 6 weeks, with a lung infection.

We just came out of the line yesterday. The ground is frozen about 6 inches now and we still have the snow I told you about in my last letter and I'd rather have the snow than rain.

More new men have joined them but no one that he knew was in that draft.

February 22

It's been about 3 wks. since Geo last wrote to Frances. He had only been out of the line for a day when his company was sent right back to the trenches.

We went over the top and right back into the German lines. We met no resistance and took a few prisoners. We expected to see great big fellows but the Germans were small

and only looked to be scared kids of about 18 years old or less. I guess I had better not tell you anymore or they might destroy this letter and that could mean another week that you get no letter from me.

We just had our old Sgt. killed the other day and it seems like we all have lost a big brother. When I think of him, I am beginning to despair of ever getting home. There are only about 35 of the original boys in our company now, the rest are all new draft's men. We have been reinforced 5 times now.

I suppose you will not have heard about poor Geo. Howe. He took sick in the trenches and the Dr. sent him out to the transport line. He had to walk about 5 miles and was then sent to the hospital. He died a few days later of double pneumonia. If I knew the address of his folks I would write to them. I miss Geo. He was liked by everyone. We thought that he could stand anything after what he'd been through in October and November, but he had too much exposure to cold and wet. The frost was down a foot into the ground and the trenches were cold and frosty so the men were always chilly and damp.

Some of the boys are getting grey hair and they are only 22. They tell me that I look as good as ever and nothing seems to have had a bad effect on me. At least I have no grey hairs yet.

I will soon have been 1 year in the army and 7 months of it in France.

March 2

Good news, we are going out for a nice little rest like we had last December, but I don't think it will be as long as last time. I was so tired and sick with a cold that I never enjoyed myself then. This time I feel "tray bon"- that's French for very good. My, I'm tickled to death with the news. I'm sitting outside in the sun writing this as the weather is getting nice now. The boys are all feeling so glad now and are having a game of football.

March 3

There is a strong rumor going around that we'll only have 10 days rest. In order to keep a little warm when we're in a dugout, we get a fire going in a brazier set in the middle of the dugout and we hope the smoke goes out the door. You ought to see our eyes water but it's better than no heat. The boys all say that I am the best fellow to get a good fire on and keep it going.

Our Sgt. and our Battalion have been highly recommended. I am sending you a copy

of the letter that the Brigadier sent our Colonel. When we were over the top, we threw explosives down a mine shaft and blew it up. It made a crater 40 feet deep and 60 feet across. For awhile the air was full of everything and a piece of something hit me in the back. My back is still a little sore but I should worry about a little trifle like that. *He wonders when the war will be over. All the boys think that it will be over this summer but he doesn't, although he hopes they're right.*

I wish I was home right now.

April 5

I suppose by the time you get this letter Walter will be back home as he told me in his last letter that he was leaving for Canada the next morning. It will soon be 7 months since he was wounded and left here. He won't be able to do much farm work but I hope that he takes life easy and takes in all the sports days and picnics.

Our old guns have been pounding away at "Old Fritz" steady and our airplanes have been on the go all day. They remind me of geese when they get away up in the air.

April 10

George was hit by a piece of shrapnel which grazed his shoulder and chest when he went out of the line. He was able to walk out along with Aubrey Wilson who was also wounded. They were sent to the hospital for 2 days and then to a Convalescent Home. A metal clip on his braces deflected the shrapnel and once again his life was saved. He had been in the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

April 15 - letter

I suppose you will be looking for a few lines from me after reading the paper. Yes, I went over the top with the rest of the boys last Monday and I am still alive. *Then he tells her about being wounded and landing up in the hospital.*

They have been moving me around and around till I'm tired of it, but there are so many wounded coming in that they must have to keep the hospital as clear as they can. I don't know about the rest of the Jansen boys but Aubrey Wilson and I knew how lucky we were to be able to walk out as we saw boys lying there wounded, and it was terrible cold. Some of the men were there for 30 hours we heard. I don't know how I could be so lucky to have gone through it all with just a small wound, only a few hours before being relieved by a change of men.

April 29

George excuses himself for not having written sooner but tells Frances that he's been very sick. He tells her that he'd been in Boulogne and left there a week ago. We arrived here the following night after having had another ride in a boxcar. It was not so bad as we were not packed like sardines this time, but I was sick with a bad cold and headache. They sent me right to the hospital when I arrived and I am writing this letter from there. I am in a Canadian Camp Hospital and they use us fine. It was so nice to get a nightgown and get in between nice clean sheets. Then did I ever sleep. I came in with a temp. of 102 and went to bed at 2:00 pm. When I woke up late the next morning my temp was normal, but I still am not feeling good to-day. I still have a terrible cold and my head still aches. They told me I have influenza. I think I'm just run down as it's been a pretty hard winter we all have had.

Boulogne is quite a nice place. I spent a couple of evenings downtown there. It makes you feel funny to see little French kids about 8 years old coming up to you and asking for cigarettes - little fellows in dresses and blowing smoke out their noses.

I am marked "Temporary Base" and I will need to go before a board there to see if I have to go up the line right away.

He wonders if Walter has arrived home yet and how he is.

May 13

My dear Frances

Well, as to-day is my birthday (*he has turned 22 years old*), I'm going to write you a long letter to celebrate. I only write to you now.

I am back in the Battalion and have been back into the line, but am out now for a few days rest. I was away from the fighting for exactly 4 weeks and it did give me a nice rest. Everything has changed a lot in these 4 weeks. There are only a few fellows that I know here now and where the shells used to drop last winter the grass is nice and green. Last night I slept outside with only my overcoat over me. The last few weeks the weather has been the finest you could imagine - what a difference between now and last winter.

It is too bad about Geo Russell and Aubrey Wilson being listed as missing. It is so hard to say it but there is no use holding hope that they might be taken prisoner. Those big shells come over and if they get a direct hit there is nothing left of the boys at all. I

have seen a lot of those horrible sights.

I think I will try to transfer to D Company so that I can get with Frank Wilson. He has been made Lance Corporal and is all alone over there and I am all alone over here. (*Geo means that they are the only ones from Jansen in each company*).

Later he writes that he went to a concert and tells her that It was not up to much. I just heard that they found Aubrey Wilson. They think that a sniper bullet got him. It is too bad. Both Geo and Aubrey were well liked and we will miss them. When the boys had a dangerous job to do one nervous fellow always had to get beside Geo and then he felt alright.

I'm quite a smoker now and don't know what I'll do when I come back and have to stop as I promised you I would. *George never did stop smoking until he was an old man.*

I suppose all the picnics will be starting pretty soon. Tell Walter to have a good time for me, too. I wish this old war was all over so that I would be able to get back to Canada and home to you.

May 18

I have been out working all day so don't think that I will have to go out on a night party so I'm writing this letter lying on my bunk. I was out the other night and it rained all the time. It was dark and we were stumbling and slipping all over the place. In a couple of days we will be going into the line again for a week or more.

I am beginning to think more of France than I ever did before as everything - trees, bushes and grass are getting so pretty and green. There is grass growing even where the shells used to drop and scare the life out of me last winter.

Well, I just got orders that I have to go on work tomorrow morning at 5:00. It is now 10:30 so I must get some sleep.

May 27

I believe that we're going to get some leave soon and I wish it would hurry up.

I suppose you all had your picnic on May 24th. I was up in the front line that day and was thinking of everyone. This is about the worst place that anyone could be on that day.

There seems to be a lot of springs around here. We can hear water running

everywhere. I never thought that this country could possibly be so pretty as it was so cold when we got here and always raining, then snowing, so that we never got warm all winter. If this war would only stop and I could get home, I'd have a fairly good opinion of France.

I have been here 10 months and we seem to have made very little progress since I got here. I'm afraid that I will be an old man by the time this war is over. If I even get 10 days leave I will be so happy just to get away from this fighting for that short while. I think of you often and wish I was home.

June 9

I had a letter from a Mr. Chisholm who wished to know about his son who had been in my company. He had received a wire saying that he was missing and wanted to know if I knew anything about him. I wrote and told him that his son was wounded April 9 (*battle of Vimy Ridge*) and died from his wounds the following day. I did not tell him that his son had suffered a great deal as he'd lain in a shell hole for 28 hours before he was found. I think that he might have lived if he'd been found in time. Some poor fellows lay out on the battlefield for 4 days waiting for help. One fellow I knew stayed out there for 4 days then when he thought that help was never going to come he started to drag himself back. He is in England now and lost a leg but at least he will not have to come back here anymore.

I still dream of you and wish this war was all over so that I could come back to you.

You said in one of your letters that you wished my wound had been a little worse so that I could have come home. I wish so, too. Poor Walter had it bad enough and I hope that with time that he will get over it. He told me in his last letter that he'd sold his place and his horses.

We often wonder what they are going to do for all us returned soldiers. I am still waiting to get my 10 days leave.

June 20

We just came out of the line this morning and are just out for a few days then back we go to do the same dirty work. Maybe I'll get a little blighty (*wound*) again and I hope it would be a little worse than last time so that I could be sent to hospital in England or better still, home. I think of you and all at home and I wish I was back home.

When I look back on it, it seems 10 months of my life wasted since I joined the army. Everybody here seems to think the same and that after the war we will begin to feel the

bad effects of all this on our health. But, wait 'til I get the homestead that the Government is going to give us when this is all over. *I do not think that the Gov't ever did give the returned men anything but praise.*

Geo tells Frances that he has started smoking and declares that he will stop when he comes back if she wants him to. He also tells her that he's never had any ambition to get any higher in the army than Private, but he tells her that he has been recommended for a higher position but turned it down. He resents the officers who have man servants to shine their boots and look after them, and another man to look after and groom their horses.

He has just heard that the boys are going to get a nice long rest but first they have to go into battle line once more.

His battalion lost all their officers but 3 and 60 percent of their men. You said that the paper said we suffered heavy losses and we did. There are 2 men left from the platoon Walter was in and 7 left in mine. The rest of Walter's platoon were taken prisoner and then they were all found dead afterwards. I saw them taken prisoner myself.

July 8

This is Sunday and Geo has just had dinner - a cup of beans, a bit of meat, 1/2 slice of bread and a cup of tea. They are now away from the front for a month's rest.

July 25

I am now driving a team and hope I can keep this job so I won't have to go into the line anymore.

Geo mentions that Frances had written in her last letter that her father has sold his farm but they are going to continue to live in the log house that he built there on the farm and he had bought a car.

July 30

I have a better job now than I've had in the army yet. One of the boys is on leave and I'm driving his team and taking care of them for the next 2 weeks. *He goes on to tell how and when he does these duties. They curry their horses 3 hours per day and they're looking as nice as can be. I'm glad I'm not in the line to-night as we can hear and see a terrible barrage going on.*

August 15

I have been out of the line now for a month and 1/2 and I don't think I will have to go in again, at least not for quite awhile. You know, I always did say that I'm coming back to you when this is all over.

There is never a day passes now that we don't get rain and we will soon have to tramp around in mud up to our hips again.

For eleven months I never took my clothes off unless I bathed and changed my clothes. Here, I take my clothes off to go to bed every night. At present I have 3 blankets and a nice little bed all my own, although it's not very wide. Last winter we got one or two blankets but while in the trenches we had none and we'd get so cold.

August 16

I did not finish this letter last night as Frank Wilson came down to take a course for a few days. He was not feeling very well - a touch of grippe, I guess. I let him sleep in my bed and I hit the hay on a few sacks of oats. I can sleep anywhere now.

I will know this week if I get to keep this job. I hope so as it is a nice job and maybe I won't have to go in line again.

September 10

I will have time to finish this letter to-day as we are letting our horses feed on grass and all we'll have to do is watch our own horses and water them. It's raining slightly so I got into an old dug-out to write and keep dry. I don't go near the line now and I'm sure you will be as glad to hear that as I am to tell you. I now feel as healthy and strong as ever.

Geo tells Frances that he has heard that Bill Diamond is OK and that Frank Wilson is next on the list for a leave and he is waiting to hear when his is coming.

Frances, at one time I hoped I'd be home for Christmas this year but have my doubts but I do know that I'll be home some time or another. I'll be 23 on my next birthday and you'll be 21. Time certainly goes by fast, does it not? It doesn't seem that long ago when I first saw you and you were 17.

This is the last letter we have written in France from George to Frances. George was officially discharged March 7, 1919 and his next letter to Frances, dated March 22, 1919, was written in Winnipeg.

This is just prior to his coming back home to Jansen. Apparently, there was what was termed shipping problems overseas. After the war ended there were thousands of men - both Canadian and American who could go home, but there was a shortage of ships to transport them all. Also, manpower was needed to clean up and to organize their departures.

What happened to George from September 9, 1917 until he arrived in Winnipeg in March of 1919 remains a mystery. Did he become ill? Was he injured? Did he keep his job caring for the officer's horses? Or did he have to go back into the 2nd and 3rd fierce onslaughts at Passchendale in Flanders Fields? Or maybe something was spilled on Frances' stache of letters. Oh, how we wish that George and Frances were here to ask, but while they were alive those letters were their private memories.