

Fourcoing.

France.

30/12/18.

My Dear Mother,

This is my birthday letter and should have been written yesterday but circumstances prevented it.

I was asked to go on a survey-salvage job back to the old fighting area, and as it promised to be an interesting trip I jumped at it. We left here by motor lorry at 9 a.m. and after passing through Ronq Minin, and Ghelewe turned on to the ill-fated ^eMinin Road. Our destination was a place called Ghelevelt but so great is the devastation, and so marvelous the change wrought even during this last six months that we got right into Ypres without realizing that we had passed it. While there of course we took the opportunity of again visiting the ruins of the Cloth-Hall etc, and also stopped for a drink of hot coffee.

We started on our way back after making full inquiries, and when we did eventually find the place we ceased to wonder why we had passed it without knowing. Of the village that once straggled on both sides on the Road there is not even a brick remaining now, or even a sign of a brick. All that marks the site now, are battered trenches, shell-holes, tanks and munitions of war of all description in all stages of rust and decay.

In the vicinity of that place alone there at least 20 tanks, (part of the fleet that were used in the push of Nov. 1917)

in all stages of ruin, mostly done by Fritz's artillery. By this time it was getting late so after a snack we set off hoping to make up for lost time. The luck seemed to be dead against us however; and after walking down a road for a while, we discovered that the old Road had been completely obliterated and we were on the temporary road built for artillery and leading in the wrong direction. We made another mistake by trying to go straight across country instead of going back along the road, and after about an hour and a half of hard walking, found we had completed a circle and were back to where we had started from. It is the worst walk I have ever had and if you people could only get just a slight idea of the state of the country round there, you would cease to wonder at the big casualty lists of those ^eMinin Road stunts. When we did at last find the right road the day was so far advanced that we were only able to do a quarter of the work we were supposed to do before darkness set in. We arrived back here about 6 p.m. and after dinner I went to a picture show with one of the boys here.

And now Mother I must tell you about our Xmas dinner.

Xmas Day was of course a complete holiday with no parades at all, so in the morning I went to Church service in the cinema and took Communion. In the afternoon I went for a long walk taking care to be back well in time for dinner which was served at 5:30. It was some dinner I can tell you and after the table s were cleared and we had a concert, I am enclosing a programme and menu and I want you to keep it for a souvenir, it

has the signature of all who were at the dinner. During the concert, wines, spirits, cigars, cigarttes etc were handed round and though some of the fellows got a bit merry, it was quite excusable under the circumstances. Among the various toasts drunk at the dinner was "The Home Folk" in Aust", and I can assure you it was the best toast of the evening and most appreciated.

After the concert was over we marched round the Streets with a big Aussie Flag in front of us, and did not turn in till about 2:30 a.m.

Well Mother we are enjoying this peace-time living as much as possible, but are all looking eargerly forward to our home-coming When it is to be, as yet we can form no idea, but I expect it will not be for some months yet. There are so many to get back and the transport accommadation is so limited.

Before I return I should like to pay another visit to Feed's grave, and hope to do so early in the New Year. It is rather awkward to get gransport to those places now, but if I can get a couple of days leave I think it could be fixed all right.

Well Mother must close now.

Very best wishes to all at home.

Your Son,

Percy.

"Fred" is mentioned

P. S. I am enclosing a few snaps.

P.R.S.