

The War Diaries of Francis James [Whiting](#)
Book 7
October 29, 1918 to December 20, 1918

October 29

This morning we received the order to get our stuff packed at once and assemble in the field at the back of the [glove] factory as we were to be transported to Germany.¹ There we received our daily ration of bread, also another half loaf per man for two more days. While we were waiting, I managed to get a mess tin of my precious potatoes cooked, which I carefully packed away for the lean days I foresee ahead. At two o'clock we moved off – the whole 800 and more of us – leaving only the old guards and the kitchen staff behind. Going through the town [Soignies] to the station, many civilians tried to give us food, but the new guards turned them back. One boy gave someone some cigarettes and was put into the town prison for his kindness. After getting into the train, we were kept until dark before the train moved out and then it only went a few kilos before it stopped for the night.

October 30

We are crowded into this car to the number of 58 English and 3 Germans. Of course, the attempt to lay down is almost impossible, but even this I did for a time last night by crawling under the seat. The air was abominable, and all the time someone would be quarrelling with someone else. I intend to watch my chance and get away if at all possible. Since leaving Soignees [Soignies] we have travelled about 45 kilos, being almost to Brussels.² Our engine takes us for a kilo or so and then stops to get up steam again. It seems to me her flues are leaking.

October 31

We passed through Brussels early this morning and from there on made good speed, or at least good speed considering. I estimate we are travelling at the rate of 15 miles an hour. This being the case we should cross the German frontier somewhere about midnight tonight, if I have my geography right. Also for the last forty kilos we run within 25 kilos of the Holland frontier.

During the day many of my companions arranged to get bread through the window of the car by either begging it from the civilians or trading their puttees or shirt for it from the Germans. I still have enough to last until tomorrow noon, so have not yet descended to either method. As a group, these are as low a quality

¹ In Frank's fictional account of the war, which drew heavily on his experiences, he wrote, "One day the order came for about seven hundred of us to be moved to Lemberg on the other side of Germany ... We were probably destined as reinforcements to a working camp labouring in the coal or salt mines." F. J. Whiting, [Getaway](#) (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing, 2000), 177.

² Brussels was 50 km north-northeast of Soignies.

as it is possible to meet. They steal one another's rations at the least opportunity, quarrel, fight, and use the most disgusting language. The Germans are bad enough, but I prefer their company to that of most of these Englishmen.

Towards night I announced my intention of leaving to a decent sort of fellow, whose address I took and who offered to aid me.³ Just at dark we stopped in a large siding a few kilos east of Liege and this boy and I got out, ostensibly to relieve ourselves.⁴ As good luck would have it, the guard had been standing at the entrance until we wanted to go out, but just at the moment we climbed down he wanted to get in again.⁵

Immediately I touched the earth, I turned short to the left and dived under the train.⁶ Before coming up on the other side, I looked carefully around to see who was about. The coast being clear I rose to my feet and walked up the train for seven or eight cars, when I left its shelter and dived under a row of red cross [Red Cross] carriages standing there.⁷ I waited then for ten or fifteen minutes intending as soon as our train would start to jump aboard again and ride outside until I had escaped from the yard which as far as I could see was enclosed more or less with water.⁸

While I waited, there arrived a big passenger train crowded with Germans. One carriage was not lit up like the rest, and watching my chance, I ran over and climbed onto the steps at the rear of this carriage just as the train was moving

³ In [Getaway](#), Frank wrote, "When it was quite dark and the men prepared to make themselves as comfortable as possible for the night, I leaned over and whispered to my companion [described earlier as a "rather decent kid"]: 'Come to the door with me and stand close. If I suddenly disappear don't gawp around but come back quickly and say nothing.'" F. J. Whiting, *Getaway*, 180.

⁴ Frank wrote, "Shortly after we left the town [Liège] we were side-tracked in a hilly, wooded part of the country, just as it began to get dark." Having just passed through Liège, the train may have stopped at Vaux-sous-Chevremont, which was 8.6 km away. F. J. Whiting *Getaway*, 180.

⁵ In his fictional account, Frank wrote, "We scrambled over to the entrance and as my good luck would have it, the guard who had been outside with one or two men re-entered the car with them. When we signified that we wanted to get down he nodded his permission and stood in the doorway, doubtless thinking he could watch us as well from there." F. J. Whiting, *Getaway*, 180.

⁶ Some idea of Frank's thoughts at the time can be gleaned from his fictional account. He wrote, "As he [the guard] stood to one side for us a dozen questions leaped to my mind. Did he have a shell in the barrel? Was his safety catch off? Was he quick-witted? Good on sharp-shooting? How far could I run straight ahead before starting to dodge...? As my feet hit the ground, it flashed through my mind that I could eliminate a lot of hazard by simply dodging under the train. Without an instant's hesitation I whirled and ducked beneath the car leaving my seat mate standing there." F. J. Whiting, *Getaway*, 180-181.

⁷ The account of this incident is more detailed in *Getaway*. Frank wrote that he "hugged" the shelter of the train as he moved in the direction of the engine, but then crawled back under the train when he heard "steps scuffling the cinders ahead of" him. He then wrote, "The man passed on, and I lost no time in crawling out again and crossed several sets of tracks to where another row of cars [Red Cross carriages] stood." *Getaway*, 181.

⁸ The fact this siding was surrounded by water may be the clue that eventually identifies its exact location. Frank realised that the water meant "all bridges on a road like this would certainly be guarded." Therefore, his best chance would be to hide somewhere on the prison train to avoid the sentries on those bridges.

out.⁹ After gaining my footing on the step, I received a shock for, on looking up, I discovered the outline of a German smoking a cigarette within a foot of my head.¹⁰ He did not speak, however, and I quickly made my way hand over hand round the end of the car, over the buffers and onto the steps of the next car. Here there was no German smoking, and though the other one could see me, I still hung on as the train was now going at a high rate of speed.¹¹ I was already, however, to jump off should he turn his light upon me or call to me to surrender. Nothing of the sort happened, however, and when next the train began to slow down I jumped off and made my way down the embankment and onto a road.¹²

Here I waited a few minutes in the shelter of a hedge until a couple of civilians, a man and a woman, passed.¹³ Then I disclosed myself, and after asking them if they were French or Belgian and being answered, I asked of them the best way to the frontier. When they learned I was English, they took me into a nearby house and there showed me a map. As I judged, I was fairly close to the frontier, but from what they told me it is very dangerous to attempt a crossing just now.¹⁴ Here they fed and washed me, also gave me civilian clothes which I pulled on over my uniform. I stayed in this house until half past nine, when a certain gentleman whose initial is C. Cuspin warned me that I had better get out of this town as it was full of Germans. He gave me the address of another man, however, who would put me up for the night in a nearby village [Soumagne]

⁹ In *Getaway*, Frank wrote, "As I stood in the shadow of the string of cars debating the matter with myself, another train from the west steamed into the yard and slowed down as it passed through. It appeared to be a passenger train laden with troops, the cars being all of the long Pullman type seen only on the crack runs in Europe. All the carriages were lighted but one, and as it glided by me, I saw my chance to get out of the yards unchallenged." *Getaway*, 181-182.

¹⁰ "Suddenly dashing forward I leaped and grasped the hand-rail at the rear of the car. But as I swung myself aboard there appeared at the open window in the door the head of a German officer." *Getaway*, 182.

¹¹ "For a second I hesitated whether or not to throw myself backward, then, as he did not seem wildly excited over his discovery, I assumed he had not recognized me as a Britisher. However, I had no intention of sticking around there under his nose and hand over hand I climbed around the end of the coach, past the buffers and on to the next coach. As I again appeared the German watched me silently." *Getaway*, 182.

¹² The account in *Getaway* is somewhat more detailed. "By this time we were out of the yards and the train clipped along at a good rate. After passing through a tunnel where I was nearly smothered by smoke I noticed the German had gone from the window. Probably he had only gone in out of the smoke but I was not taking any chances and when next the train slowed down a little on the curve overlooking a high embankment, I jumped." *Getaway*, 182.

¹³ Frank may have left the train near Magnée, which was a few km east of Vaux-sur-Chèvremont. He "struck out in a northerly direction," stopped at a "ditch of water" where he drank his "fill" and washed his "filthy hands and face." He rested there a while, then moved on to a "well-travelled road" where he "lay down in the shelter of a hedge to await someone" who could give him directions. See *Getaway*, 182-183. He was probably near Fléron, which was about 2 km directly north of Magnée, or Ayeneux, which was about the same distance to the northeast.

¹⁴ Frank wrote that the "Holland frontier" was "eighteen kilometres – about ten miles – straight north" of where he met the Belgium civilians, which would locate him somewhere between Magnée and Fléron. The border was dangerous because "the Germans had a triple belt of barbed wire entanglements all along the boundary ... electrified, and guards at intervals of less than one hundred yards continually patrolled between their posts." See *Getaway*, 183.

where there were no Germans. He took me part of the way and having put me onto the right road bade me goodnight and good luck. After a short walk I came to this village and having enquired of the ladies for the address given me discovered the house dark and shut up for the night.¹⁵ Not wishing to disturb the good people I then went away and having found an old cart in a sheltered corner I curled up there and spent the rest of the night.

November 1

This morning I introduced myself and having given Monsieur Daniel the paper from Monsieur Cuspin was taken in and treated with warm hospitality. As I cannot speak much French they brought in a lady [Madame Wilkin] who could speak very good English and who acted as interpreter. From what I can gather it is next to impossible to get across the frontier on account of the electric wires and the vigilance of the guards who are only a few yards apart. During the course of the day I spoke with several upon the matter and have practically decided to stay here in Belgium until the war is over. From the news the last few days it will not be long now. Bulgaria, Turkey and Austria have thrown in their hands and no one expects that German will continue alone beyond the week. It seems only a matter of days now, and it is not worth risking a shot for the sake of a little patience.

November 4

Last night I slept in a real bed for the first time in ten months. The people here are very kind and never seem to tire of trying to make me feel at home. I spend most of my time in the bake house with the son who is a baker.¹⁶ I talk quite a lot with him as best I can, also read nothing but French and am picking up new words every little while.

November 5

For the last few days I have stayed with these good bakers stopping for the most part in the bake house where I am pretty well out of sight. There are no Germans here but of course they pass through the town from time to time. Also there is danger of certain civilians seeing me who might accidentally mention they had seen a stranger in the village [who] was a foreigner.

November 11

During the past week events have moved with speed in the world war. Turkey and Austria-Hungary have capitulated under exacting conditions of armistice. Hungary has broken off with Austria and set up a Republic. These last few days have each had its rumor of an armistice signed between Germany and the allies.

¹⁵ His new found friends escorted him out of the village and he followed the road directly to Soumagne, where M. Daniel, the village baker, would receive him. Since Frank mentioned no villages along the way, it seems likely that he set out from the village of Ayeneux, which was less than 3 km southwest of Soumagne. See [Getaway](#), 184.

¹⁶ Frank wrote, "I disliked accepting the charity of those good people. The stout baker finally settled my last objection by offering me a job for my board in the bake-room." *Getaway*, 185.

But today at noon the thing seems as if it is really a fact. Belgian flags are flying in the village and this afternoon I am going to venture out. They say there is a general revolt among the German soldiers, many of them in a wood nearby having thrown away their arms and killed their officers. At present I hardly know what to do. I want to get to Canada for Xmas if possible. To do this I have no time to waste hanging around base camp as I am liable to if I re-surrender to the Germans or seek the English army. They – the French – tell me that under the conditions of armistice Germany must return her prisoners of war within eight days and evacuate Belgium within fifteen.¹⁷ To go north through Holland and from there across to England is my quickest route but I have no money for either railway fare or steamboat so that I must re-surrender to whoever is transporting the prisoners. However I shall not move from my little refuge until I am more certain of what is happening. Rumor has it that Liege is closed owing to the trouble with the German soldiery. Later heard definitely the armistice was signed today and that to all intents and purposes the war is over. After longing and waiting for such a day to arrive for such a long, long time it is now at last hard to realize there is nothing to fear from our friend the enemy.

This morning at 5:30 the Kaiser or to be correct, the ex-Kaiser passed through the village in an automobile on his way to the Holland frontier. He was arrested however on the border and now is I suppose in comparative safety. This evening Madame Wilkin the lady who speaks English came round to my lodgings. They forward every argument for me to agree to stay until our troops come – perhaps another week or two. But I want to get to the coast as quick as possible now that it is safe to travel in daylight. However I agreed to wait another couple of days or so in order to see what turns up. Made a date with Madame Wilkin and her beautiful young cousin to visit Liege tomorrow.

November 12

This morning about 10 we left Soumagne and walked to Fleron [Fléron] where we boarded a train which took us into Liege.¹⁸ On the way we passed numerous small parties of from two to a dozen Germans packed up and making their way east to Germany. From the lack of order and officers I judge them to be deserters that are going home on their account. Nearly all of them wear a small red flag or ribbon to signify their sympathy with the revolution. In Liege every house had its big red black and yellow flag of Belgium. The streets thronged with people all out to celebrate the glorious news. Parties of them parading arm in arm down the centre of the street singing the Marseillaise and the Belgian National anthem. Many also were rather drunk. On the street also were many British and allied prisoners whose guards had deserted and left them to look after themselves. I spoke to several. They will certainly be well looked after by the civilians as every time one or two of them stopped to speak a dense crowd gathered round,

¹⁷ The "French" were probably "Three French soldiers" who were "also in hiding" in Soumagne. [Getaway](#), 184-185.

¹⁸ They only made a day trip.

shaking hands, offering them drinks and smokes and generally making much of them. It reminded me of the old saw about every dog having his day. Certain it was those Tommies were having theirs today.

November 13

Today I mended my khaki pants, sewed buttons on my old overcoat, washed my puttees and generally got things ready as I intend making a move towards Antwerp or Anovers [Anvers]¹⁹ in the morning. It is about a hundred miles from here. They say there are no trains running now but I can walk it in three days if it came to that. Anyway I have stayed here long enough upon these good people.

November 14

This morning after leaving Soumagne and having my picture taken I walked as far as Visé [Visé] – 14 kilos.²⁰ Before leaving Madame Wilkin offered to lend me 20 marks as I am of course practically out of funds. Monsieur Davoel [Daniel?] gave me 5 but I told him I would return it together with the four he gave me the day I went to Liege. My opinion of my worthy host is that he is a bit of a skinner. Anyway I will forward him his nine marks as soon as I can. After getting to Visé I was told there that I would be interned if I attempted to pass the frontier of Holland so as I did not like the idea I decided to try for Antwerp. This is about 160 kilos from here. From Visé I walked to Bassenge²¹ where I learned four other Britishers were staying. On locating them I was promptly invited to stay until the English came – another eight or nine days. I would not promise this but I decided to stay here all night. While here I wrote a letter home which our host is sending through via Holland in the morning.

November 15

I started off again this morning intending to jump a German freight train running northwest from Tongres [Tongeren].²² On the way I aided three Flemish ladies carry their valise which seemed a little heavy and was insulted by the offer of money when we parted in Tongres. However, two minutes later I asked a priest where and how about the railways and was being led away by him in search of something to eat when we were accosted by a young Frenchman. What he said I did not catch but anyway he took me in tow and conducted me to his home, a beautifully appointed villa nearby.²³ His sister [Hortense] can talk a bit of English

¹⁹ Anvers is the French name for Antwerp, which was 116 km. west of Soumagne.

²⁰ Visé is north-northwest of Soumagne.

²¹ Bassenge is 8.7 km west of Visé.

²² Tongres (French) or Tongeren (Flemish) was about 14 km west of Basenge.

²³ The young man was actually a young Belgian named Antoine Armand Emile Delvoie, the 16-year-old son of a prominent lawyer in Tongres/Tongeren named Joseph Hubert Dominique Delvoie. See [Delvoie Family](#). Information obtained by email from Judge Guy Delvoie, 27 May 2009. Frank described the villa as a "huge mansion on the main boulevard." [Getaway](#), 189.

and they have persuaded me to stay here until the English come.²⁴ There are some German officers here too but they are not allowed to mix with the family. They wonder greatly who I am and question the servants greatly as to why I am made so welcome. The hospitality of this family is truly beautiful. Nothing but the best is good enough for me. My bedroom is a dream.²⁵ Evidently I have landed upon my feet here. The initials of the family are upon all the linen in the bedroom. Everything is edged with hand made lace.

November 16

This morning was spent in what was I suppose a “den” in happier days but which now has to do duty as a drawing (room) since our friends the Huns occupy the drawing room proper. Emile, the son, a nice lad of sixteen and I are teaching one another our respective languages. He picks up English quickly. This afternoon he and I visited a small village some two or three kilometres away.

November 17

The weather is very cold these days. Spent the morning studying French and the afternoon with Emile looking at a football match between a team of the released English prisoners and the local team. Our men were hopelessly outclassed.

November 20

This afternoon rounded up a few Hun souvenirs – among them a German helmet and bayonet. Most of the British are leaving tomorrow morning for Holland where they will go immediately to England. Have been persuaded to stay for a while longer. Not hard to persuade. Wrote letters to London, Piza [Beaumont] and Jean [Irving]. They will go via Holland.

Sat. November 23

These are the days when some of my dreams come true. Here, all is calm and clean and comfortable and luxurious. I spend my time as I will which, for the most part is in the armchair by the fire talking to Hortense – a very pretty child of eighteen.²⁶ Occasionally, in the evening we play a quiet game of cards en famille. Emile has a very good violin which I saw at whenever I feel inclined. Also spend a little time writing semi-plagiarized poetry either for the girls or my own amusement.²⁷

²⁴ Frank described Hortense as “a golden haired little beauty of eighteen.” [Getaway](#), 189.

²⁵ Frank wrote that the bedroom was a “symphonic dream in white and blue and gold; lace-hung bed curtains, full length mirrors, French windows opening upon a roof garden. *Getaway*, 189.

²⁶ [Hortense](#) Marie Victorine Delvoie was the second child of [Joseph](#) Hubert Dominique Delvoie and [Gabrielle](#) Marie-Louise Lamotte. Information obtained by email from Judge Guy Delvoie, 27 May 2009.

²⁷ Hortense had two sisters, Nathalie Hortense Marie Gabrielle and Yvonne Marie Antoinette Paule. Information obtained by email from Judge Guy Delvoie, 27 May 2009.

Sunday, November 24

This morning I saw the first two Belgians to reach the ville since the Germans have been retiring. The joy of these people at the sight of their soldiers returning after four years of war is very touching. The people here have started demolishing the houses of those who welcomed the Germans to their homes during the occupation. The women that loved the Germans not wisely have had their hair cut off in nearly all the towns. Tonight the mob is going around smashing everything in the houses of the offenders.²⁸

November 25

Today the Belgian cavalry were due at the town hall at 12 noon.²⁹ All the town was out to welcome them including the band. It is very touching to witness the extreme joy of these poor people. After four years of the iron heel of that horrid Thing we have been fighting to see once more their own sons and troops.³⁰ The King and his parliament came back to Brussels the other day and M. Delvoie was there.³¹ He says the populace and the soldiery was mad for joy. It is only during the last week or two that I have learned just what it was I have been fighting against all this time. The insufferable cruelties, murders, indignities, thefts and hardships untold that the German beasts have inflicted upon the people make me feel regretful that I will have no more chance to make them pay a little for their fun.

²⁸ Frank wrote, "Many an hour ... I sat in the window seat of the Petit Salon watching the seemingly endless files of field-grey as they [German soldiers] swung singing past to the eastward. But gradually the numbers thinned, then ceased entirely. The Town Kommandant and his staff moved out, and the long, white road was empty. As soon as the last vestiges of military authority had vanished, the townsfolk tore down the many sign-boards and notices in German – hated symbols of a hated rule – and held a joyous bonfire with them on the public square. People who had been friendly with the invaders, especially the women, were hunted down like rats and their hair cropped short to their heads. They were then banished from the city and their homes looted." [Getaway](#), 189-190.

²⁹ Prior to their arrival, Frank wrote, "First came a solitary cavalryman – a lancer – clip-clopping proudly down the centre of the street. The news flashed through the town, and the crowd of excited citizens, wild with joy, that immediately gathered almost mobbed the fellow. As his horse gently forced its way along, many women crowded forward to kiss his dusty stirrup or coat. At the Mairie he delivered word that on the following day at twelve sharp the division that had gone to the war from this area would arrive home. This, I thought, was a very generous concession to sentiment on the part of the military authorities. And then such a bustling hither and yon! Such a search for Belgian and Allied flags so long hidden from view. In a neighbouring field the town band began to practice the long forbidden "*streng verboden*" Belgian national anthem and the *Marseillaise*." [Getaway](#), 190.

³⁰ Of this event, Frank wrote, "Next morning shortly after eleven every person in the town assembled around the cobble stoned square in the shadow of the old, old cathedral ... Peace had come at last and in her wake the little army of loved ones, long banished ... At last they appeared! Headed by the town band – they might have been playing the *Marseillaise*, but no one could hear the music for the cheers. Pelted with a storm of flowers, about twenty-five horsemen formed up around the square coming to a halt facing the centre. Then came the infantry, numbering perhaps two hundred. The flowers and the cheers! With shrieks of joy some woman by the roadside would recognize her own particular soldier and rush forward to get a preliminary hug and kiss. Inside the hollow square made by the cavalry the infantry formed up in columns of platoons." [Getaway](#), 191.

³¹ Joseph Hubert Dominique Delvoie (1868-1921) was the father of Emile and Hortense. For additional information about him, see [Delvoie Family](#).

November 26

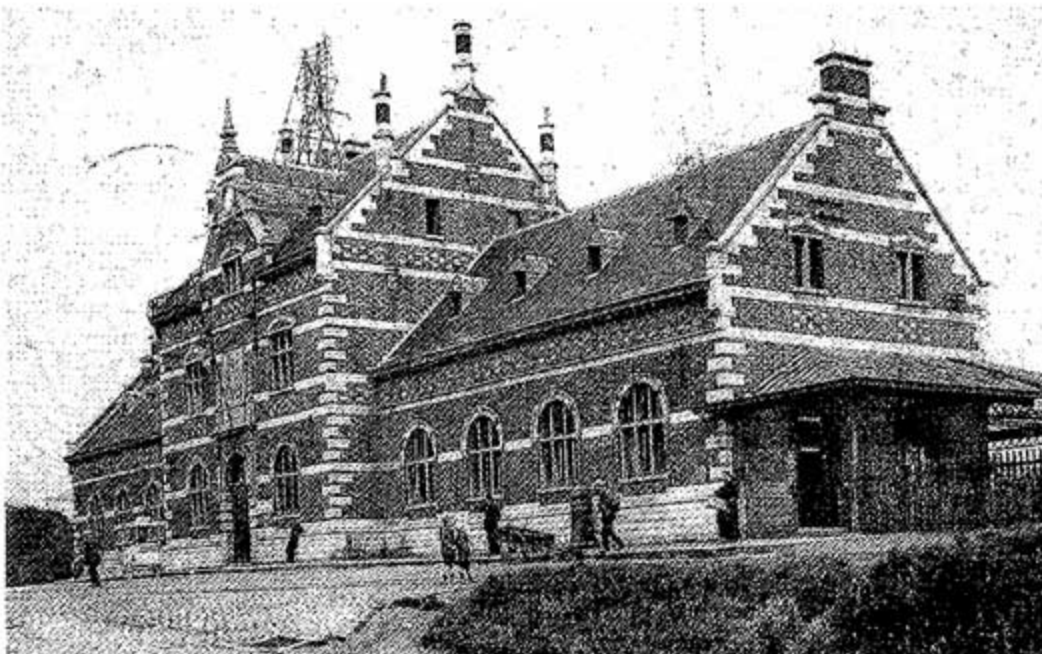
Great doings in Tongres! The Belgian infantry have arrived and 18 of their officers dine at our house. The girls are nearly wild with joy. Tonight is coming to sleep in my bedroom the Preceptor [teacher] of one of the princes of Belgium.³²

November 27

Preceptor did not come last night. Girls very disappointed.

November 28

Were supposed to have been moved back to Maastricht today but order was cancelled.³³ However, I said goodbye, took my little bit of stuff and hit for there alone. Stopped at frontier however by Dutch soldiers. Frontier closed to British on account of trouble with England over Kaiser who is interned in Holland. Returned to Tongres.



Railway station in Tongres, Belgium
Courtesy Judge Guy Delvoie, 16 June 2009

November 29

All prisoners staying here assembled at noon at train station and were loaded up.

³² Considerable work had to be done in preparation for the arrival of the officers. "The huge brass and crystal chandelier from its secret hiding place under the stairs was carefully exhumed and re-hung in its proper place in the Grande Salon. From the garden heavy sacks of brass and copper door knobs, window and dresser handles were unearthed, polished and screwed back into their original places." [Getaway](#), 190-191.

³³ Maastricht was in the Netherlands about 25 km east of Tongeren/Tongres.

Said final goodbyes and left for Brussels.³⁴ Hortense gave me her photo and I arranged to write occasionally. They tried to give me hundred francs at least but I would only accept fifty and that only as a loan. Arrived at Brussels at 10 tonight after having cracked an Imperial on the jaw when he did not mind his own business. We were being taken to a place near the Hotel De Ville for the night when I noticed a Canadian standing on the sidewalk. On making enquiries I soon discovered a few P.P. [Princess Patricia's] men in a nearby motor lorry. Among them was Roy [Melville](#) and they sure gave me a great welcome. They dragged me into the lorry which was just starting off for Mons – 60 kilos.³⁵ They were in for the day and visiting the city which is like a small Paris in beauty. Then and there I decided to go along with them and see the Batt. We arrived in Mons about two in the morning and Roy fixed me up for a bed in the canteen.

November 30

All day I have been a full blown hero. From the Colonel [Gault](#) down the crowd welcomed me back in no unmistakable manner.³⁶ Even the sweet Slim [Allan](#) shook hands. I hated to do it but the Padre seemed to expect it so I weakened and gave him a limp paw which I hope will be a little more tense the next time he feels it.³⁷ Leslie [Hancock](#) was alright also Major [McDonald](#), Barney [Todd](#), [H.A.] [Nesbitt](#), and old [A.A.] [Bremner](#) who was on leave. Was very sorry to miss him but I expect I will run into him in England. T.J. [Lilly](#) gave me a ticket to the theatre tonight. They are playing Miss Pinafore. I attended and it was very good. Teddy Sam [Rawe](#) was killed back at Hermaville.³⁸ Red [R.W.] [Wilson](#) wounded almost the last day of the war. Lt. [S.] Lockson [Loptson](#)³⁹ killed also Col. [C.J.T.] [Stewart](#) at Cambrai. A parcel of chocolate for me from Mr. A.S. at post office. L.C. [Jenkins](#)⁴⁰ missing believed killed in Arras battle. After the theatre I reported at Cav. Barracks where repatriated are being cared for.

³⁴ Brussels was about 90 km west of Tongeren/Tongres.

³⁵ Mons was 68 km southwest of Brussels.

³⁶ In a letter from Mons, 22 Nov. 1918, Agar [Adamson](#) wrote, "The Corps Commander has agreed to Gault Commanding the Regiment and this morning he took over and the Regiment was paraded and handed over to him..." [Letters of Agar Adamson](#), 351.

³⁷ Even the armistice wasn't enough to end Frank's war with Slim!

³⁸ In fact, Pte. Rawe was wounded and later died of wounds sustained at Bernaville, which was 52 km west of Arras.

³⁹ Lt. Svienbjorn Loptson, Reg. No. McGill 227, had enlisted with the 2nd University Company in June 1915 at Montreal. 24-year-old Lt. Loptson died on 29 September 1918 of wounds sustained the previous day during the PPCLI offensive at Tilloy-les-Cambrai, Battle of the Canal du Nord.

⁴⁰ L/Cpl. Morgan Jones Jenkins was a 3rd year student at M.A.C. when Frank was there in 1914-15. Jenkins enlisted in 1915 with the 3rd Univ. Co. and served in France with the P.P.C.L.I. He was killed in action during the Arras Offensive on 28 August 1918. University of Manitoba, Role of Honour 1914-1918 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1923), 72.

December 1

This morning wrote a letter home also one to Hortense. Received new suit of clothes, boots and overcoat. This afternoon met George [Malcolm](#). He is billeted in same barracks.

December 2

This morning went out into the town and bought a few postcards of the ville. Met [Alexander] [Brickland](#) of the 9th. Very surprised and glad to see me. They are having a glorious time in this town. Shortly after dinner we were paraded down to the station and loaded aboard box cars to be shipped down to Valenciennes.⁴¹ The Germans have made a terrible mess of the railway. Nearly every rail is broken and every switch blown up. We reached Val. Somewhere about midnight and after a good supper went to bed on a good palliase with four new blankets.

December 3

We expected to be sent out today but tonight are still here.

December 4

Still in Val. Bought some lace for someone. Have not yet decided for whom. Concert tonight in big auditorium.

December 5

Bought an English book this morning and read it during the day – My Official Wife – very good. There is a picture show on tonight but dense crowd makes the air so bad that it is not worth while enduring for the sake of the pictures. The English King visited here today at 2 o'clock but I was so interested in my book that I did not bother going out to see him. Must tell Hortense that, she is such a staunch little Royalist that it will shock her greatly.

December 6

Today we were loaded aboard a hospital train and after travelling all night arrived at Calais the following noon.⁴²

December 7

Were not supposed to go out tonight but another Canadian named Tom Lane and I got out and went down town. Enjoyed good fish supper.

December 8

All day kept busy getting kit and one thing and another.

December 9

This morning loaded on boat and arrived at Dover by noon. Met by Red Cross

⁴¹ Valenciennes was about 42 km west of Mons.

⁴² Calais was on the northern coast of France about 140 km northwest of Valenciennes as "the crow flies," but the circuitous route of the railway would have made it considerably further.

ladies with food etc. Taken to big villa under castle where Canadians are quartered. Went down town tonight – had to escape via wired garden. Went to vaudeville. Show punk.

December 10

Today got more kit from Canadian Q. M. stores. Also leave warrant and ration cards. Message from King – printed. Very decent concert tonight in Y. M. C.A. hut.

December 11

This morning left Dover, Lane riding as far as Chatham where he changed for Strood. Landed in London in time for dinner. Folks delighted to see me. Had received one or two letters and cards. No word from home saying they knew of my safety. Tonight Mr. and Mrs. Fraser who room upstairs came down and also Miss Beaton to hear my little tale of adventure. It took about two and a half hours. They command me to rewrite it in story form.



Ruth Beaumont standing in front of Thorneyfield,
Ambleside, Westmorland, U.K.
Courtesy Raymond Shirritt-Beaumont

December 12

Wrote to Mother, Jean [Irving] and several others. Telegram from Thorneyfield

with congrats on safe return.⁴³ Went up town to get pay book fixed up. Have \$85 coming up to end of November.

December 13

Am getting the little copper mascot Ethel gave me three years ago silver plated and mounted on a brooch. Bought three tickets for "Pirates of Penzance" to be held Sat. afternoon. Am taking aunt and uncle.

December 14

This afternoon we went to the show. Queen Alexandra was there.⁴⁴ Our seat was quite close and once I caught her eye. She keeps her age wonderfully well.



Queen Alexandra, ca. 1905
Courtesy Wikimedia Commons

December 15

Went up to Ealing today. Saw Jean [Irving] and brought her down here to tea. Will Nokes and Muriel here. Went back with Will, Muriel and Jean and after an hour or two at Ethel's took Jean home to Winton house.

December 16

Shopping today. Writing letters. Bought Xmas presents. Pin for Piza [Beaumont], brooch for Jean [Irving], book for someone else.

⁴³ Thorneyfield was a house in Ambleside, Westmorland England, the residence of Ruth, Clara, and Isabella (Piza) Beaumont, the three aunts who raised Jean Irving after her mother Agnes Beaumont Irving died in South Africa.

⁴⁴ Queen Alexandra was the widow of Edward VII and mother of King George V.

December 17

Wrote letters all day. At night went out all alone away up town and back through park and round by the Albert Hall.

December 18

This morning received answer to letter written to Miss Creed at His Majesty's Theatre. Hugh [\[Creed\]](#) down at Arpington, Kent. Ward 8. Went down in afternoon. On way met Lt. Jenkins [\[Jeakins\]](#), Lt. [A.E.] [Potts](#) and a 2 coy. Officer – I forget his name. [H.] Creed was looking pretty well but one leg was gone just below the crotch, the other had a huge piece of shrapnel just below the femur and in the knee. While there I saw Terry [McGovern](#) and a man named [W.J.] Patterson [\[Paterson\]](#) of the 1st McGills, taken prisoner 2nd June 1916. Left Hugh about eight. Shortly after getting back to Charing + [Cross] met [F.T] [Mabson](#). He is Y.M.C.A. officer at Engineering Bureau, Charing + [Cross] station.

December 19

Today went for a good bath at Hammersmith Baths. Sent away cheque to Hortense as 50 franc bill was returned by censor. Yesterday drew 5 pounds from Union Bank City.

December 20

After having my fortune told by Miss Ashdown on the cards and being warned of a "spade lady" I came by train up as far as Preston. Here I was unable either to make connection to Windermere or send a telegram. So I decided to stay anyway. After quite a time I succeeded in getting a room in the [Old] Bull and Royal Hotel.⁴⁵ They were having a fancy dress ball there and were enjoying themselves hugely. Slept well in a very good room for which however they charged me ...

The last few pages of this book have been cut out and it is not possible even to put in anything from them as they are cleanly removed close to the binding.

⁴⁵ The Old Bull and Royal Hotel, Church Street, has been demolished now and replaced by the City Centre Hotel.