## Letter from Orville C. Davis August 4, 1915

Transcription:

Aug 4th /1915

My dear mother

Just received your letter and one from Guy supposed he was at home by this time, so directed my last letter to him to home, was pleased to get yours anyway for had not received any letters for long time

Am writing this in my little dug out, it is 6 ft long by 4 ft wide and about 3 ft high covered over with plank and sand bags so when a shrapnel shell bursts we are quite well protected, this time we are in support, a trench about 100 yards behind our firing line in case of an attack we are handy to go right up and help, we all thought there was trouble in the air last night an awful uproar of rifle fire on our left and the sky all lighted up with German rockets, we got all ready to rush up and help our own boys in case of necessity but it died down in 15 minutes it seemed an hour, my heart was more than putting in the licks from the excitement but when it comes to a pinch and have to go up front and do my bit. I seem to forget everything until it all over,

was on a fatigue party last night also, carrying stakes and barbed wire, and took my turn at sentry 12 till 2 Am and today carried some more wire and helped make wire entanglements to put in front of trench so to bother them coming across "when they do." took my turn at sentry today 2 PM till 4 PM cleaned my rifle and bayonet, oiled my shoes. got a jug of water, and went over my shirt lice hunting so you know what I have done today so far, they are firing at an aeroplane out here just now that's an old story now too, a big German guns goes off about every five minutes shakes the whole ground, don't worry me any for it is not coming my way away off to the left. the fellow that is in this dug out with me claims to be an american, but I think he is a German. he can talk German to beat the band. I have one of these English French German books, I soft soaped him a little he talked a lot, and showed me a map he had drawn, don't know if it is amounts to anything or not.

What shall I say now? can't think of anything only minor things that happen here, you might say I have been away from civilization almost seven months in strange lands, and all I know is what is going on about me, my old temper is coming back on me again, knocking about with roughs and every class of men for a year, you have to be ready to stand up for yourself at all times for if you back down the least bit the whole bunch will see you are a little afraid and nag the life out of you, and there are times when we all get sick and tired of each others company I and the rest have owned up to it, and there is always one or two that get on your nerves the moment you first put your eyes on them, there are fine fellows, gentlemen and all classes are represented in an army. It has been worse sine we got a couple of new drafts of men to take the place of our killed and wounded. I used to feel proud marching along, every one in one step, arm swinging with the old bunch [?], everybody knew each other

and knew that everyone could be pretty well depended upon, but the most of them are gone. Oh yes, there has been a few cases of fever one fellow just came from the doctor in the trench his temp" is away up, but I believe they take some kind of stuff so to get out of the trenches. x "Did well! not a thing to say and wrote a whole page, does that kind of stuff interest you"x They are still after the airship, the big gun has stopped and one of those machine guns that shoot about 650 shots per minute has started. sounds just like a big woodpecker would sound on a hollow tree. "big wood pecker + big tree I mean" x that has stopped now. You ought to see our water closets only they are called latrines in the army. when in trenches you balance yourself on a pole, when out they dig narrow holes in the ground, at first I had an awful time I was either tipping forward or backward all the time couldn't seem to keep balanced, but

I am an expert at it now. we are expecting 400 men to make us stronger and perhaps will not have to come into the trenches anymore for I think it will need the three of us on cook kitchen, wouldn't that great, would not be in any danger at all worth speaking of, I am not building air castles then I won't be disappointed. You cannot hear a sound. you would never think a war was on just now. Oh Yes! got two parcels from lassie [?] yesterday, 2 pencils, shaving soap, 4 plugs tobacco, and a box of chocolates all jammed up, they was good just the same. it was all gone before I got the cover fairly off. chocolates someone said and it went down the line like greased lightening, I told her to send thin stockings and she sent thick chocolates, probably coming later, but there should have been a letter with them anyway. x Two or three shells are going over [?] high up, can hear them whistle don't know where they are from or going.

Another aeroplane overhead will take a peep and let you know if it is one of ours. one of the boys said some one the Germans was firing at few minutes [?] ago, x down the line three fellows are playing cards for cigarettes, another hole in the wall with a pair of feet sticking out. and a x fellow left me 5 figs while I was gone, I can hear curses coming up the line, a little Welshman went about 1/2 mile and got a gallon jar of water. he stopped at the latrines and they stole the water on him and left the empty jar he just shook my bottle to see if it was full, he knew it should be empty for he asked me for a drink before he went. a little rifle fire on both sides has sprung up now "swipes I guess." my mate is picking lice of his shirt now, a scotchman is singing in the next dug out. it is my chosen [?] Sammy Hewit fine a fellow as ever breathed. x ever since we

left Montreal we have been in same tent, slept together most of the time, in the same hut on Salisbury Plain [Eng ?] always planned to march side by side and share the same dug out but we got mixed this time some way anything extra always comes to me first and I to him. we lay side by side for hours, not a word spoken, and we are both satisfied. we understand each other, we discuss the war once in a while, he knows I don't like anybody whose mouth is going all the time and saying noting and he don't like them either.x Our officer is 6 ft 4 in tall.x It is getting dark [illegible], will have to wait until tomorrow, if God is willing, you can see by what I have just written the little things that happen all the time from minute to minute, x when it is growing dark at night and coming light in the morning is the two times you have to dread all attacks and charges are

made at these times, daylight comes here about 2.30 AM to 3 AM. Good night.

2x 10 AM Aug 5 Everything passed off quiet last no firing to speak of. three fellows had a quarrel about stealing each others ration of bread last evening. this morning so far have done my sentry duty of two hours, had breakfast and cleaned the dug out up for the doctor comes around and inspects them if to dirty you get [illegible], so many extra guards or extra work. there is a party behind us digging a trench or something an the Germans have been firing shells at them all the morning. they are going over our heads but I duck everytime just the same, always try and be on the safe side. they sometimes go off before they should. then you would catch it. x I think we are going out tonight if so will mail this tomorrow the 6th you will get it the 19th if I am not mistaken.

x Feel kind of dopey this morning [torn] kind of muggy and sleeping with all your clothes on even shoes for 8 or 10 days you don't get much rest. there has been times when we did not have anything off at all for two and three weeks. wading in mud and filthy water, you can imagine what it smells like when they all take their shoes off. especially my own. x Would like to have one of the chickens you tell about in a pot boiling where I could get just a whiff of it once in a while. If I ever get out of this thing will step along some for couple of weeks after. Guy said in his other letter that Harry had gone to Calif" and said the same thing in his last letter, wanted me to be sure and know it I guess. Dear old bird I like to see his writing in ink. the moment I see it, I can see him. They are still shelling behind us. Don't work yourself to death over the chickens and other animals. it is now 11:30 AM will tell you what happens rest of day in the morning if God is willing and send this along. will follow it up day after day so you will know just

[torn] at we all are doing and how modern warfare is carried on. I suppose you notice I put in if God is willing. it does not pay to plan ahead for a single second on this job. it only takes a fraction of a second to upset them and yourself. It has started to shower a little. Have started a letter to Classie[?] cannot think of anything to say at all, only stuff that I know will maker her temper fly. I told her for one thing, that you said the kids were looking fine \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ It has stopped raining, and I say the x Germans are only about 230 or 240 yards away lots of places their trench is much nearer and sometimes farther away, sometimes as close as 50, 75, 100, 150 yards and all distances, I can hit an army bulls eye at 100 yds 4 our of 5 times and they can shoot better than that. it is careful business even at 250 yds for they have funs with a telescope attachment. "6.30 PM getting packed up to move out, heavy bombardment on our left think there is a fight on

" Aug 6th 9.30 AM x

We came out last night left quite late, pitch dark, arrived here around midnight, hot tea waiting for us, just woke up few minutes ago and had breakfast, shaved and have got dressed for inspection by some big bug. He will probably say 'Well Boys you are looking fine, and pass along and that will end the performance. one shell burst just before we came out and some of the pieces fell in the trench near some boys but not near me. the only one we had sent over us for the day quite a few bullets went by us on the way out but not near enough to amount to much. will start today cutting meat, bacon etc, and making tea for the boys. it is official now that Warsaw [?] has fallen, that will prolong the war just so much longer. Heard a rumour this morning that the 1st Division is going away back for a long rest and the 2nd Division is to take our place. They haven't been here at all, and we need the rest sure enough. only hope this is true.

12

This is to happen this month, but you cannot believe a word they tell you, they are always telling us good news like that to brighten us up and make us more contented. we have been fooled too many times to believe all we hear. also we all expect to get a 7 day pass to England for vacation, few at a time. I don't expect to get mine until next year sometime, will take it when it comes anyway although do not know a soul in England. it will be a little rest and change. you only have 4 days over there it takes the rest to go and come. you can see Eng" from France in some places it is so very far across the channel. Did I ever tell you about the trip from Eng" to France when we came over. I cannot describe it just as it was or how I felt. Well! We received orders on Salisbury Plains one night to pack and get ready for we was leaving Eng", such rejoicing and noise by the boys "they are rejoicing so much now"

13

New boots were issued to us day or two before and such boots, hurt your feet in every place just like iron. Well! they loaded everything conceivable on us so our pack must have weighed very near 80 or 90 lbs besides other things that we never had use for, stood us in the dark about two hours with this pack on, and when they thought we was about ready to faint, we started for the station only about 2 1/2 miles. we got there after awhile and got aboard the train. odd[?] trains and odd[?] engines but they go like the wind. we were packed like sardines, took my shoes of to ease my feet and about 4 yards of cloth we have to wrap around our legs from ankles to knees, it was part of our dress. went to sleep until we got there about daylight next morning, could not find this cloth and had lost my hat [?]. was that sleepy and tired did not care much but I looked bad stockings half way up my leg, bare from top of stockings to above knees limping along we saw a nice large ship thought it was for us

14

but it wasn't, we was put aboard a large tramp steamer, stayed on board and not allowed off for two days, the third night we pulled out. I always wanted to be on a rough sea and see some of the mountain high waves I have heard and read about. it was in the bay of Biscay, was not sea sick at all. we was six days going the way we went, the course was changed to fool the German submarines, any other time could have crossed in 3 hours it was rough the whole time. I held my breath more than half the time crossing, first the stern would be away down and the water pour in over the[n] up the stern would come and the bow would go away down almost under the water, every time I expected to see her keep right on going down head first and along with that she was rolling from side to side you would think she was going to keep right on rolling until she went over, along with all this first you was a great

15

hole, had to look up to see the top, next moment you was away up on top looking down into the hole. they told us that it was very bad at that time of year. I kept my eye on a life belt until you could almost see where it as worn by my watching it so close. the officials gave the ship up as lost and sent a lot of torpedo boats and cruisers out hunting for us, we pulled into a harbor and got tied up to some kind of a wharf. there was crowds of French people young and old to welcome us, threw oranges and every thing good to eat at us, but we were not allowed off the boat, when we did land [section crossed off] I got twisted went into box cars 40 and 42 men in each car, rode 3 days and nights with only four stops of about 15 mins each, going a good clip all the time. when we got of the train, tired out, put on our packs and marched 25 miles mostly in the rain, some swearing, x you could hear me above the others.

16

And the rest is history. since then we have been in Belgium then France then Belgium then France again but not yet in Germany. I said something about an inspection today I had to go it was by our General Alderson, General Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia of Canada. I can't remember what he said only that he was proud of us fighting men and in Val Cartier Can" he thought we was handsome and that we was just as handsome now (Some Bull) also that a lot of us had fallen and that there would be more of us fall (He appeared to be looking at me when he said that, and it didn't please me much) and that he wanted to tell the married men that their wives and children would be well cared for if they fell in battle as he had passed a law or something giving very liberal pensions (very cheerful, don't you think) and that the single men with only sweethearts, that some other fellow would take care of them until he returned x and I wanted to tell him

17

a d- lot of the married ones too. the old mans voice broke and I thought he was going to cry. he turned away and that ended it. a prince of some Indian troops was there. will tell you about the trip across the Atlantic next time. You can let Classie [?] have this for I cannot think of hardly anything to write, unless I copied this off and I would be humpbacked. received the rose ok and it is in my bible. it is now 3:30 P.M. will start again tomorrow. will close with lots of love.

Orville [underlined]

PS.

When I get this started I will take a long breath. it is so long. you ,mght send a little note book this size then I could carry it in my pocket and write Write Write over

Give my regards to any and everybody. Was that Hannah Barton and her cousin Frank you spoke of? How is Geo Stone James Bickwell Clara Stone Any Fisher boys home Let me know sure

*Transcription produced by the DigitalMaine Transcription Project*