

**Archives of Manitoba, Jack Winter Quelch fonds,
Letter from 17 October 1916, P517/3.**

FRANCE

October 17th, 1916

Dear Father

I have just been reading in the "Free Press" a piece about autumn scenery in Manitoba. I should not mind being there to see it. The scenery where we are now is just like that represented in the picture Steve cut out of the "Graphic" & hung over Mother's desk in the dining room. Only there are fewer trees, in fact nothing, but stumps left. It is dotted with camps as far as you can see. Not the regular bell tent, I expect you may know what they are like; one of the businesses you have to get down on all fours & crawl around in. We have tied several together & raised them up on ammunition boxes, so have a little more room. The only trouble is they sag a little & make a pocket which lets the rain in. Sometimes you get a drop on your nose just as you are going to sleep: but with our steel helmets on the top of our rifles we manage to squeeze out some of the pockets.

Well I am out of luck with this letter writing. We have to go out & build dugouts ----

----Well we are in for dinner so will polish off a few more lines before going out. I should have written yesterday, but when we get back from the trenches we seem to find enough cleaning up to do to last a week. What with washing, shaving, & bathing & trying to rid yourself of some company & this last job is mostly a waste of time as you have just as many in a day or two. We get new blankets every time we come out & they are generally full of them. I expect you will know pretty well where we are by the papers. But I think I can let you know pretty close without any harm. There was a picture of a certain church in France, in one of the illustrated papers, with a statue of the Holy Virgin on the steeple, which had been hit by a shell & not blown off, but just bent over at right angles & the saying was, when this should fall, that the war would end. Well our camp is within a mile & half of this church. It is a regular landmark.

I saw one old "tank" that had been put out of commission up near the front line, but did not have a look inside as things were a little warm just then. Hiney was sniping at us with "wissbangs". These are three inch shells, just small ones. They call "Fritz," "Hiney" in these parts. We were on a water carrying party at the time in a village much mentioned in the British recent advance, not a village now, but a heap of debris. There were some gruesome sights there, which showed what must have taken place. You could smell the place, half a mile away. They were mostly the [corpses] of Hineys, but there were some of our poor chaps among them. If I see this through I shall not forget that place.

There is a big mine crater; big enough to put two Birtle town Halls into: it is just about a mile from here.

This is a different place to where we were before. Hiney [put?] over "coal boxes", "wissbangs" & shrapnel in plenty, & not just for an hour or so, but all the time, both night & day. Well this is enough of this stuff. I will tell you more if I have the good luck to see you again.

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Tell Mother with many thanks that I got the cake yesterday & have now to go out to work again, so will halt for a while.

--- Well I will make another start. I have just been tramping the country to find a candle. I managed to find where I could buy one, after much trouble. Tell her I think the tallow candles will be the best to send, as they burn longer, they are things that are always handy here, & hard to get, also writing paper & addressed envelopes, as both ink & paper are scarce. Tell Mother the cake was very nice, but it is inclined to get mouldy on the way over. So I think it might be better to send more parcels like the one with the sardines in. As we can pack chocolate & tinned stuff away & take it up to the front line, where we need all we can stow away. The Oxo is "Jake" also the sardines. I usually have a few of them just before rolling in. I had a mess tin full of Oxo last night & it was all right – believe me.

The 78th are quartered about two miles from here. I have not been over to see any of the boys yet, as we are kept pretty busy & spend spare time cleaning up & all sorts of jobs.

I am on the sniping job & think it will be permanent. Round here you can see a dozen aeroplanes in the air every minute of the day & usually more.

And now I must say goodbye. Give my love to all

Your [affectionate] son,

Jack