

13th November 1918  
St. Romain

Dear Family:

As usual, I'm writing when I've no business to - I ought to be in bed, but I've had two experiences today I guess you couldn't imagine; I've been throwing hand grenades and I've led a religious service. I don't know which scared me the most, but I think it was the service!

It's been a glorious day - clear and not too cold - and Captain Grand said he'd show me how to throw grenades I just couldn't resist. I chucked the job I was supposed to be doing - accounts - and we made for the parade ground, about a mile out beyond the village. The air was like "vin blanc" and the combination of weather and the exhilaration of feeling free, and the excitement of firing real bombs, and the general peace happiness made us feel so fine that we raced as far as I could run just for the sheer joy of motion.

When we got to the big field there wasn't a soul there - just a big wind-swept plain with far off glimpses of red roofs and white straight roads. The Captain showed me the different kinds of trenches and told me a lot of his experiences at the Front (he dropped bombs from an air plane on Metz and did a lot of other exciting things). Then we came to the trench where he had some grenades and he explained them to me and threw one or two. Scared! When it came my turn to throw I was petrified! But I wouldn't have shown it for worlds. I pulled out the spring and slung the grenade over the top very much as we used to bowl cricket balls. My! How it did explode! I couldn't throw as far as the Captain and some of the dirt splattered back on us, but we were absolutely safe behind the high clay embankment of the trench. I couldn't see where they hit at all - we could just hear the explosion and see flying dirt and smoke. Afterwards we climbed out and found our holes.

It was lots of fun and frightfully exciting. I threw three. I'm glad I did it, but I don't think I'll do it again. I ought to have come home after that, but woods edged the field at the back, and there was a winding road through them and I'd fallen so far from the path of duty anyway that I thought I'd fall a little farther, so we cut into the woods - real, piny, Mastic woods, and had a gorgeous walk.

I didn't get settled back in my room until half past 4 which gave me only one hour to plan my service for the evening. You see the point was that Mr. Prentice - the Y Divisional Religious Director - wants me to put on a mid-week evening service and promises to send out men to hold it. We've had two or three, some of them aren't so bad, but he doesn't seem to care much about the calibre of the preacher, all he takes into account is the actual fact of producing a service. I'd been thinking a lot about our peace celebration out here. We'd had lots of hurrah boys, and lots of drinking, but no one has given any religious turn to the celebration, and I felt the lack of it. Mr. Prentice came out this morning, and said he'd send out some sergeant or other. I suddenly and quite unexpectedly to myself said "Don't send anyone, let me talk tonight" How's that for nerve! The moment afterward I quaked, but Mr. Prentice was delighted and we settled it.

All day I had it in the back of my mind, and after the walk I got busy and jotted down some notes I had put out the blackboard saying:

TONIGHT  
6:30 A short service of Thanksgiving.  
7:00 Band Concert.

Well! After mass I came down to the tent, and found it, as usual, jam crowded. I went to about the middle of the tent and climbed on a bench on one side and called for attention. Everybody quieted down. I said that perhaps they hadn't seen my sign during the afternoon, so that I wanted to tell them that I was going to hold a short service but that if anyone wanted to get out he could before we began. Not a man budged - and my! what a crowd there was. There wasn't even space around the entrance as there usually is. It was just black with men. Of